The Gift of Leaven: A new feminist theological praxis for urban church

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He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.' (Matthew 13:33 [New Revised Standard Version])

Acknowledgements

It has been a journey and a half to get to this point and it has not been possible to make this journey on my own.

At Chester we have a 'learning community' and my particular thanks go to my peers who have kept step with me over the last seven years. To Wayne and Chris for their steady supervision and for our cohort of 2011: Gill; Helen; Lynita; Ruth; Stephen and Susie. To Martin who got there before us!

To my friends and family who have had to cope with my absences as I lost myself in books, reading, writing and pretending to be clever … to Julia and Ruth for their love and faithfulness.

To the women of Bootle who let me hear their stories, inviting me into their homes and their lives.

Thank you for making *this* happening possible!

The material being presented for examination is my own work and had not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

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Abstract

This thesis documents my research quest into the post-regeneration community of Bootle, North Liverpool. A Housing Market Renewal Initiative had decimated the area. As a Church of England minister, I was struggling to find signs of life and had no theological paradigm in which to situate my ministerial practice.

My argument is that the current arborescent theology and practices of the Church of England have excluded the *phronēsis* of white working-class women and have failed to deliver a life-sustaining praxis for urban church. I argue for a reprioritisation of the poor and the inclusion of marginalised voices; allowing these voices to shape and define the academy as opposed to letting the academy shape which voices are to be heard.

I came to this research holding a feminist and liberative theological standpoint: prioritising and privileging the voices of women and those on the margins. My research design adopts a feminist and narrative methodological framework in its quest to uncover the hidden *phronēsis* of the Bootle women. The transcripts of their lives are analysed using a thematic network analysis which generates three global themes: hope; placed and particular; and the death space. This thematic network is the main finding of my research quest and is the Gift of Leaven: the distilled *phronēsis* of the Bootle women.

This research project is multidisciplinary. The Gift of Leaven is brought into conversation with voices from social science; public urban theology; feminist theology; and urban geography. Through a spiralling process of theological reflection the strands of a new feminist theological praxis for urban church are defined.

What I produce in this thesis is a new feminist praxis for urban church from the underside of life and from voices that are notably absent from academia and ecclesiology. This new praxis is not a carefully-crafted mission action plan of how the Church should engage in urban life. What is offered instead is a new way of seeing and feeling the urban. This is situated within the *lo cotidiano* and objects of the ordinary and is revealed through fragments; it is new women's knowledge coming to birth in women's story and women's song. It does not readily offer quick social or theological fixes to life's fissures. It provides a way of flourishing and life from a different paradigm, and that paradigm is the *phronēsis* of the Bootle women. It is the women themselves who become the heralds of good tidings and the God bearers. They bring the Gift of Leaven for the whole community so that bread may be baked and the wounded body fed. The task is now to make space so their voices can be heard.

Summary of Portfolio

My research journey as a DProf student spans a period of seven years when I was priest in charge of a small urban church. It was sparked by an unarticulated hunch that the Church of England had lost its desire and appetite for urban ministry. I found there was a lack of theological and ministerial resources that I could usefully engage to assist me in my task as parish priest: I was working in a vacuum of theological thought and intent.

In my first year on the DProf programme I wrote a Literature Review that charted the developments of public urban theology within the British context, mapping out the Church of England's response to the urban poor. The final chapter reflected on the notion of the 'Big Society' (The Cabinet Office, 2010) surmising how the Church of England has had a tendency to align itself with the dominant social order instead of being a prophetic voice to challenge structural inequalities. I concluded by proposing that: "There is a need for a new public urban theology that can help frame the work of the church in the urban setting … what is needed next is to listen to the stories from *the underside of history"* (Literature Review, TH8002, July 2012, p. 50).

My Publishable Article in year two began to give voice to these stories from "the underside of history" (Graham, 2009a, p. 148). I wove together the stories of place, church and my own ministerial practice in order to provide fresh insights and understanding to the current predicament of urban church. I suggested the need for the institutional Church to reconnect with a 'bias to the poor', a concept that is further developed in my final thesis.

In my Reflection on Practice (TH004, July 2014) I considered my experience of the doctoral process as a form of 'quest narrative' (Frye, 1957). This enabled me to tell my own story and be more aware of the self that I was bringing to the research process. As my research project developed, the need for a high degree of reflexivity became increasingly apparent. My research was as much about hearing myself into speech as it was about hearing the stories from the urban.

My Research Proposal helped to articulate my research question: Can the storied lives of the white working-class women from Bootle help define a new feminist theological praxis for urban church? The project that emerges and is documented in this thesis is a qualitative feminist research project that helps further our understanding of life in the urban and also articulates and defines a new liberative feminist theological praxis for urban church.

Introduction

> Have you ever been in the hospice Claire? You know in the rooms … Michael was in Maple Room, and if you look out of Maple Room there is a little garden … there's this big round light like a cross of metal it is, I think it's to keep the bulb in place, and he was smiling at that and I don't know what made me think that was heaven. (Dawn) [1]

The above extract is taken from Dawn's transcript, the "text" of her life (Graham, 2009a, p. 151), in which she offers to me something of a revelation of "another world" (Forrester, 2005, p. 20). This revelation, like a crystal refracting light, distils something to me of the deeper mystery of God. Until Dawn had spoken and I had "heard her into speech" (Morton, 1985), that "mystery" (Sobrino, 2008, p. 72) had remained hidden.

The intention behind this research project is to uncover this "practical wisdom (*phronēsis*)" (Graham, 2009a, p. 152), this hidden leaven from the lives and experiences of twelve white working-class women from Bootle, North Liverpool. These are voices that are seldom heard in both the academy and the institution (Clark-King, 2003). It is the women from Bootle, from whom paradoxically "no one expects good to come" (Morisy, 2004, p. 82) that offer this Gift of Leaven for the whole Church and for the nourishment of the pilgrim people of God (Forrester, 2005, p. 18).

This project is deeply contextual and born out of my own ministerial practice as parish priest to the community of St John & St James, Bootle. The area had been decimated and effaced by a Housing Market Renewal

[1] Dawn is one of the women participants of my research, for a full list of research participants see Table 3.1.

Initiative (HMRI). [2] By 2010 the banking crisis and imposed austerity agenda meant that the programme remained incomplete; I was left ministering in a 'ghost town'. I wondered where life [3] could be found in my community, I wondered as to where life in all her flourishing could be present at all. When 'everything of value had been removed from the dwelling' [4] I needed a new horizon and vantage point from which I could begin to reframe my own ministerial practice.

My argument is that the current metanarrative of the Church of England with its 'Church growth' [5] agenda does little to foster life within the urban context. In order to avoid squeezing out the *phronēsis* of the white working-class women I argue for a reprioritising of the poor. Within my ministerial practice I was disturbed by the Church's lack of concern for the 'urban poor', perceiving that a 'priority for the poor' [6] had somehow metamorphosed into a 'priority for growth' (Newman, 2011). I was left holding a vacuum of silence of theological thought and intent.

We live now in a post-regeneration era. [7] Prior to this the Church 'piggybacked' onto regeneration programmes for its means of social

[2] In 2002 the government established the Housing Market Renewal Initiative, a radical approach to addressing the problems of neighbourhoods, which have suffered long-standing deprivation. In total there were nine "Pathfinder Projects" identified of which the New Heartlands Pathfinder in Liverpool was one. The aim of the programme was to renew neighbourhoods by changing the housing market itself (National Audit Office, 2007: Para. 1,4,15).
[3] The reference to 'life' throughout this thesis is synonymous with God. Where life is understood to be God and God is understood to be life. Linking to the Johannine Gospel: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10 [New Revised Standard Version]); and the "God of Life" referenced by Gutiérrez (1991).
[4] When the homes had been cleared of belongings and were boarded-up waiting for demolition a notice would be placed on them stating: "Everything of value has been removed from this dwelling".
[5] 'Church growth' was the first Quinquennial goal set by the Archbishop of Canterbury (General Synod, 2012).
[6] A 'bias to the poor' was embedded in the first pastoral guideline that was issued in 1968 by the Catholic Bishops of Latin American stating a "preferential option for the poor" (Boff, 1988, p. 23). Following the school of liberation theology (Boff, 1988, 1992; Gutierréz, 1988, 1991; Sobrino, 1985, 2008) the 'preferential option for the poor' was then adopted by British urban liberation theologians in the 1970s and 80s notably Chris Rowland and John Vincent (1977) and David Sheppard in his classic texts, *Built as a City* (1974) and *Bias to the Poor* (1983).
[7] O'Brien and Matthews provide a comprehensive overview of 'post-regeneration'. Essentially what happens next in our urban communities now that regeneration policies have ceased? There are currently no government policies for the regeneration of communities: "in essence, we have entered a phase of post urban policy" (O'Brien & Matthews, 2016, p. 21).

engagement. Now that regeneration has gone bust there is no clear theological framework for how the Church is to engage in its poorest communities. This research project speaks into this theological gap in current arborescent [8] urban theology following on from *Faithful Cities* (CULF, 2006) and is defined by the problematic of a lack of a meaningful public urban theology for a post-regeneration community. However, whilst the arborescent urban theology of the institutional Church appears to have been sleeping new rhizomatic urban theological practices have emerged from the "cracks and crevices" (Baker, 2013, p. 4) of life. This research is located within this newly emerging rhizomatic stream of urban theological practice.

This research project extends the work of Cloke and Pears (2016a, 2016b) by critically redefining a praxis for urban church through the actual voices and experiences of those living within a marginalised community. I argue that the majority of current urban theology has been written from an "armchair" (Gutiérrez, 1988, p. 12) observance of the urban experience, whereas the aim of this research is to excavate the voices and *then* define the praxis. It follows the school of feminist (Graham, 2009a, 2014; Grey, 1989, 1997a, 1997b; King, 1989; Ruether, 1983; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983, 1993; Slee, 2003, 2014, 2015) and liberative (Boff, 1988, 1992; Gutierréz, 1988, 1991; Sobrino, 1985, 2008) theological traditions by intentionally privileging and prioritising the voices of white working-class women.

Whist there are examples in literature of feminist research methods being used to interpret women's lives and experiences (Bons-Storm, 1996; Graham & Halsey, 1993; Slee, 2004; Slee, Porter & Phillips, 2013, 2018) there is limited work that has occurred within the urban context. One notable exception is the work of Clark-King (2003, 2004), who interrogates

[8] Chris Baker (2013) proposes that current urban theology can be categorized as either arborescent or rhizomatic. Arborescent is related to a secular reading of society, it is tree-like and sustains theories and practices that are hierarchically produced. In contrast, rhizomatic theories relate to a postsecular reading of society where knowledge and systems are produced horizontally and "eschew grand narratives" (Baker, 2013, p. 4).

feminist theology through the voices of white working-class women from the North East. Clark-King's work is an important reference point for this thesis. However, this thesis is not about interrogating *existing* feminist theology but in defining a *new* praxis. Following Graham's interpretive model for transforming practice (1996), it is the orthopraxis of the women that is the site for my research enquiry. What this research, therefore, contributes to the corpus of knowledge on urban theology is a praxis that is uniquely and authentically rooted from and within the lives and experiences of the Bootle women.

Within this research I am adopting Forrester's (2005) correlation approach to practical theology, in which the task of theological enquiry is to mine out fragments of the Christian tradition from contexts and communities (p. ix). The notion of theological fragments is taken from the work of Kierkegaard (1936) in which a 'conversation' between Jesus and Socrates is imagined. Neither offers a system of beliefs or a programme of intervention but offer fragments, teaching that "truth was something to be lived and loved, not simply reflected upon or studied" (Forrester, 2005, p. 2).

> Often the task involves sorting and arranging fragments, *not* so much like the pieces of a jigsaw so that the unified picture may emerge from interlocking pieces, but rather that the fragments may be put to use in various ways for the welfare and salvation of women and men. (My emphasis; Forrester, 2005, p. 19)

The fragments are found within people's stories and contain, road metal [9] and grit, gems and crystals (Ibid, p. 20). These fragments are "an enigma" (Ibid, p. 7) of the whole truth, reflecting in themselves more of a lasting hope than grand systematic theories and "huge ideologies that seem now to have collapsed" (Ibid, p. 20). It is these fragments that are then offered back

[9] 'Road metal' is a term developed by Duncan Forrester (2005) and is the rubble that has been mined out in our extraction from the quarry of the theological fragments and is "used for making firm, straight paths on which God's people can move forward" (p. 20).

to the Christian community becoming "food, nourishment for a pilgrim people" (Ibid, p. 18). Forrester suggests that quarrying is a parallel analogy to that of crumbs of bread broken from the host (Ibid, pp. 18-19). In this research I am developing this analogy further in that it is the actual grains of leaven, not the crumbs, that become the object of my research quest.

The concept of leaven is taken from the parable of the leaven (Matthew 13:33) where a small quantity of leaven, the active yeast, causes the whole batch of dough to rise. The flour, in the parable, represents the Church and the academy; the leaven is the Gift of Leaven, the *phronēsis* and practical wisdom of the Bootle women. It is only when the Gift of Leaven is mixed into the flour and kneaded back into the dough that the batch can rise. The leaven is Sobrino's gift of "the poor" (2008, p. 62) or, for the purpose of this thesis, the gift of the white working-class women, that within our arborescent theological paradigms is generally ignored. It is the Bootle women who bring their particular Gift of Leaven which is necessary for the whole Church in order that bread can be baked, blessed and broken and that there may be "nourishment for [the] pilgrim people [of God]" (Forrester, 2005, p. 18).

> To put it plainly, the poor have values and produce positive realities and new social forms that … appear as a sign for others … They can become … the leaven that makes the dough expand, which means they can produce salvation beyond themselves. (Sobrino, 2008, p. 63)

The leaven, like Forrester's fragments, contains "irritants" (2005, p. 20) which can help the Church to engage more creatively in urban communities. I will argue that it is these irritants and gems and crystal, the leaven from the quarry, which can help shape and redefine the arborescent theologies of the Church. Both Deleuze's concept of rhizomatic knowledge (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and Forrester's (2005) theological fragments suggest the need to offer an alternative method for viewing how knowledge and

theology are constructed, deviating away from grand centrally placed arborescent ecclesiologies to the more rhizomatically produced theological fragments.

The Gift of Leaven, the *phronēsis* of the Bootle women, is extracted from the women's stories using the tools of a feminist qualitative research methodology (Slee, 2004; Slee, Porter & Philips, 2013, 2018). The resulting thematic network (Attride-Stirling, 2001) has three global themes: hope; placed and particular; and the death space. [10] This thematic network is my main research finding. It is unique to this research and particular to the Bootle women, and is defined in this thesis as the Gift of Leaven. It is this Gift of Leaven that is then brought into conversation with feminist theology, urban theology and urban geography through a spiraling "process of investigation and theological reflection [leading to] freshly informed practice" (Pears, 2013, p. 89). It is the texts of the lives of the women from Bootle that then become the "first act" (Slee, 2004, p. 6) in defining a new feminist theological praxis for urban church.

This new feminist theological praxis for urban church is presented as fragments and is situational within the ordinary and the everyday. This is not a carefully-crafted six-point plan for how the Church should engage in urban ministry. What is offered instead is a new way of seeing and feeling the urban through the lens of the Bootle women. It is revealed through moments and simple acts of kindness, where the 'cuppa tea' becomes a generative place for new beginnings. This new praxis embodies a resilience to life and witnesses to life's terrors; acknowledging that not every story has a happy-ever-after ending. This new way of seeing the urban is defined by the death space, is placed and particular; and mediated by hope in which the eschatology of heaven becomes near and present.

[10] 'The death space' is my own terminology that has arisen directly out of my research findings. It represents the awfulness and terrors of life and is explored in further depth in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

This research project is as much about process and being as it is about quantifiable research results. It is about creating "new ways of doing theology" (Slee, 2013, p. 13) and creating new woman's knowledge. The whole research process was undertaken as much as a spiritual exercise as it was an academic endeavour, viewing the transcripts of the women as "holy writ" and "sacred texts" (Slee, 2013, pp. 17-24). A key element of feminist research is to ensure a high degree of reflexivity and that I write myself into the research process (Slee, 2004, p. 51). This reflexivity can be seen throughout my thesis, evident in journal extracts and by intentionally writing in the first person. This research is as much about hearing myself into speech as it is about hearing the women from Bootle.

The "architecture" (Trafford & Leshem, 2008, pp. 53-66) of my thesis is structured around the concept of staging a theatrical production. It is the *phronēsis* of the twelve white working-class women from Bootle that is The Main Performance, this takes centre stage in the thesis and is staged in two Acts. However, before the production can begin the stage needs to be set.

Chapter 1 is Setting the Stage, it provides a description of the place, the ecclesiastical parish of St John & St James where all *this* story began. It is where I situate my own place within the research paradigm: expressing my commitment to a 'bias to the poor' and my prioritising of women's voice and experience.

Chapter 2 is the Prelude where 'the other actors on the stage' are introduced and my theoretical concepts are defined. This chapter reflects the multidisciplinary nature of this research project: drawing theoretical perspectives from the schools of feminism; social science; urban geography; and public urban theory and theology. A key voice throughout this thesis is Grace Jantzen (1984, 1999, 2004, 2009) and the 'new horizon' offered by her theory of natality. The school of feminist practical theology provides "road metal" (Forrester, 2005, p. 20) for unearthing the hidden leaven, the *phronēsis* and practical wisdom of the women (Graham, 2009a, pp. 151-

152). It is the '*lo cotidiano*' [11] which then defines the ordinary and everyday experience of the women's lives and the place where this "liberative praxis" (Gutiérrez, 1988, p. xxx) can be found. The school of urban geography articulates why the sense of place is so important to our human condition. The importance of the everyday (Pink, 2012), of holy ordinary objects (Lefebvre, 1991) and "the god of little things" (Kearney & Kristeva, 2016, p. 95) suggest that it is within the ordinary objects of everyday life that new revelations are constructed and made. The "drama of creation" (Graham & Lowe, 2009, p. xx) describes the field of public urban theology in which this thesis is situated.

Narrative and feminist theories influence my methodological approach. These are discussed in Chapter 3 (The Intermission) alongside the methods I use to construct this qualitative feminist research project. Semi-structured interviews are my main method of enquiry. Consideration is given to ethical concerns; researcher bias; and "dimensions of Otherness" (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996, p. 1). The research transcripts are thematically coded, and then further analysed using Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analysis. The resulting thematic network is defined as the Gift of Leaven.

The Main Performance is staged over three chapters and it is here that the results and analysis of my research project are presented. In Chapter 4, Act I of The Main Performance, there is an uncovering of the Gift of Leaven that has been excavated from the stories of the women. This is the main finding of my research project. Further analysis of my research data continues in Act II of the Main Performance: a spiralling process of theological reflection (see Fig. 4.5). This process has two reflective turns in which the Gift of Leaven is brought into conversation with voices from the academy. The first reflective turn, Chapter 5, frames the women's voices around 'objects of the ordinary', situating the leaven back into the *lo cotidiano* of the women's

[11] *Lo cotidiano* is a term from Mujerista Theology. It is the lived ordinary everyday experience of Latina women and the source for a liberative praxis (Isasi-D*íaz*, 2002).

lives. The second reflective turn, Chapter 6, offers six 'theological fragments' from which a new feminist theological praxis for urban church is defined.

Chapter 7 is the Finale and celebrates the new women's knowledge that has been generated by this research project and concludes by reflecting on the DProf process as transformational praxis. In this final chapter I consider the wider implications and achievements of this research project for academia and Church practice.

In this introduction I have scoped out the parameters of my research project. The prompts for my research are contextual and theoretical. What I argue in this thesis is that current arborescent theologies and practices of the Church of England exclude the *phronēsis* of the Bootle women and fail to deliver a life-sustaining praxis for urban church. Following liberation and feminist tradition, I employ the tools of a qualitative feminist research methodology to extract the hidden *phronēsis* of the white working-class women from Bootle. The thematic network generated by my data analysis has three global themes: hope; placed and particular; and the death space. This is my main research finding and is defined as the Gift of Leaven. It is this Gift of Leaven that then becomes the 'first act' in defining a new feminist theological praxis for urban church. This new praxis is situated within the ordinary and the everyday and revealed in fragments, providing to the Church and academy a new way of seeing and feeling the urban as defined by the Bootle women.

What I attend to next in this thesis is the context where all *this* happening takes place, the parish of St John & St James, Bootle.

Chapter 1. Setting the Stage

1.1 Description of place

> Bootle is a bit like Nazareth, a place from which no one expects good to come … there is an inclination to hold onto the loser's memory, because the stories that people encounter are often about losing. (Morisy, 2004, p. 82)

Bootle is geographically located about six miles north of Liverpool City centre and is in the Metropolitan Borough of Sefton. The area of Bootle is considered to be one of the most deprived in the country and is also one of the least ethnically diverse, falling into the bottom 3% nationally for ethnic diversity. [12] Other statistics identify a high number of single parent families and low levels of educational attainment (CUF, 2017). There are anecdotally generations of worklessness, with the first, second and third generation of the same family being unemployed. Aspirations are low, and those who do aspire want to move out. There is what is called a 'northern drift' where those who become educated or financially secure drift away from Bootle towards the more prosperous communities of Crosby, Formby and Southport.

There is a 'mantra' that hangs over Bootle: "Can anything good come out of Bootle?" People have heard this for so long that they seem to believe it. I remember when I first visited the parish, a member from the congregation gave me some chocolate to take home, "I just wanted you to go home with something good!" What she was implying was that there was nothing 'good' in Bootle! In recent times Bootle has had the harrowing experience of being the home of The Strand Shopping Centre from where the toddler Jamie

[12] The community is ranked within the top 5% of deprived communities nationally and ranked 319 out of 12599 parishes in England where 1 is the most deprived (CUF, 2017).

Bulger was abducted and murdered by his child-killers. It is something from which Bootle has never really recovered. The profound issue of child-on-child murder highlights some of the much deeper problems that this impoverished community holds.

In April 2002, the then Labour Government launched the Housing Market Renewal Initiative (HMRI). It was intended as a piece of social engineering in which areas of deprivation would be regenerated by changing the nature of the housing market itself (National Audit Office, 2007: Para. 1,4,15). Within North Liverpool one such Pathfinder Area was identified, namely the Old Welsh Streets of the Klondyke.

Built by William Jones in 1884, the Klondyke area consisted of around 750 dwellings of terraced streets. 'Klondyke' Jones turned the natural clay reserves of the area into red bricks which became his 'gold', hence the term Klondyke from the Wild West of "panning for gold" (KRA, 2006). It was a very tightknit community and a sought-after area in which to live.

Originally a seaside town, Bootle had a natural watercourse and a number of fresh water springs, the Bootle Water Works provided bottled water for the residents of Liverpool and further afield. Heavy industry such as Hawthorne Road Tannery and the Rope Works also defined the area. These old industrial sites have long since closed but the springs are still present as various local names would suggest, Springwell Road, Springwell School and Marsh Lane. However, the 'cost' of heavy industry has contaminated the watercourse and the springs are now polluted; like the water of Marah (Exodus 15:23) they have become bitter and unfit to drink.

At the edge of the Klondyke community was the Parish Church of St John & St James. Built in 1910, it stood at the heart of the community for 100 years. By the time I arrived in the parish the community and church were in a state of disrepair. The community had been fractured and dispersed by the HMRI, the resulting inertia leading to a breeding ground for gang and gun violence.

> When I first arrived in Bootle, I sat in my car, parked in one of the Old Welsh Streets. The area seemed quiet and it took some time for me to realise that the houses were no longer occupied. They had been boarded-up with Perspex, net curtains still hung at the windows giving the haunting impression of life, but that 'life' had departed when the residents had been moved and their homes shut up. I drove the car down a few more blocks until I sat outside the church. The buildings looked derelict, sad and worn. There were trees growing out of the roof gutters and the only visible notice read, "Danger Keep Out". (Personal Journal, 23rd November 2008)

As part of the HMRI the church decided to partner with the local council in a two-fold programme: firstly, to demolish the existing church buildings; and secondly, to build a new community and church facility. In May 2010, exactly 100 years since the foundation stone had been laid, St John & St James Church was demolished. People gathered to watch the spectacle of stone, brick and wood that had stood for the past century being pulled to the ground. The foundations had been laid bare.

Fig.1.1 Demolition of the Old St John & St James Church (Dawson, C. 2010, May. Unpublished).

New homes were soon erected on the old site. However, by August 2010 the first round of the coalition government's spending cuts took hold. Priorities had shifted, and the funding promised for the new community facility was withdrawn. The church and community were left in a state of limbo and abandonment. Neil McDonald from Housing for Justice writes:

> Acute deprivation has been exacerbated by the state in which the sudden ending of the HMRI … has left the area. There is a block of streets consisting of around 750 houses which have been boarded-up apart from 50 that are still occupied, many by elderly and disabled residents. Residents have no clarity about when, if ever, they will be rehoused. (McDonald, 2011, Para 10: h)

Since 2010 the church continued to meet as a worshiping community and set up temporary home in the local state primary school. We were in a very vulnerable and precarious position, but this also led to new relationships and partnerships within our community. However, the lack of a permanent church building profoundly inhibited and restricted our capacity.

There was no sense of place within our community and no sense of community within our place. "We need our church back!" "When are the council going to give us our church?" These were frequent questions from people in the area. There was no visible sacred space present within the community. Funerals, weddings and baptisms took place in neighbouring churches. There was no community space within the neigbourhood, no place for people to gather, no place for us as a community to begin again.

In January 2014 after much negotiation St John & St James Church purchased the Old St Stephens URC Chapel for refurbishment, as the New St John & St James. New windows and glass doors would ensure that life from the community outside could flow in and life from the church could flow out, it was a reminder that we were mutually dependent upon each other. The new church was eventually opened in June 2015 to great celebration! It was

a day we never thought we would see. The new church is now an important part of community life [13] and it is where we, as community, began again to build relationships and a sense of belonging. It is here also that we found God's own presence touching and healing our own lives beyond what we thought was possible.

Fig.1.2 The revealing of the cross (Dawson, C. 2015, June. Unpublished).

The photograph above shows the new cross being installed the evening before the New St John & St James Church was officially opened. It is a revealing, an uncovering, a reminder that the Church is "*semper reformanda,* always in the process of re-creation and discovery" (Gorringe, 2008, p. 114).

The initial prompts for this research project were generated by this social and geographical context. Within the harrowing effects of a post-regeneration community, when 'everything of value had been removed from the dwelling', I wondered as to where life in all her flourishing could be found.

[13] See: www.stjohnandstjames.org

1.2 Situating self

I came to Bootle in August 2008, having completed my curacy in Southwell & Nottingham Diocese. Prior to ordination I was a qualified social worker and at the heart of my being was a social gospel: good news to the poor as we hear proclaimed by Christ(a) in the synagogue (Luke 4:16-20); perceiving the work of God as her liberating action in the world; and the mission of the Church to be engaged in society and make a difference. Following the school of liberation theology (Boff, 1988, 1992; Gutierréz, 1988, 1991; Sobrino, 1985, 2008), my God held a bias to the under privileged, those on the margins; and it would be through them that God's salvation would enter the world.

I had always found myself to be on the edge of Church, never really fitting in. It took me years to understand why this was and that the fault was not my own. The majority of teaching was 'malestream', God was most definitely a 'he', and the theology I was hearing was very cerebral and held a high value to personal salvation. I found myself on a personal level depressed and alienated from my faith. I could not equate what I was hearing on Sunday with my own personal circumstances; there was a major disconnect.

Over several years I took the opportunity to go on retreats where I encountered Sophia, the Wisdom of God. I slowly discovered a wide range of literature and theology that had previously eluded me. It was from the feminist tradition that I was able to gain insights and find a connection.

> I am recognizing a re-awakening and connecting of my own self … how I have come to understand and embody my Christian faith and its outworking for justice and compassion. Church for me is and always has been a difficult place/space to embody, due in part to the patriarchal dominance and the split off from feelings, emotions, passions (Slee, 2011, p. 2). Never really feeling 'I fit', disconnected in my gut. I find myself five years into parish ministry in a deprived

> urban community. I have more questions than answers and embody a daily struggle. Linking to what Grey would call the 'dark night' of the Church and our need to surrender to darkness and acknowledge vulnerability and wait (Grey, 1997a, p. 52). (Research Journal, 24th October 2013)

Feminist theology has helped to give voice and define my own place within the patriarchal structures of the Church of England. The compassion Slee (2011) encapsulates as the core driver of what it means to be essentially human, resonates with my own sense of self and the need to trust the inner voice, the inner wisdom. To trust what Audre Lorde (2013) considers, in her powerful writing on erotic power, to be the defining 'yes' within ourselves that is not subject to constraint from external sources which seek only our oppression. The need to find "a kernel within myself [which] when released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through the colours of my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience" (Lorde, 2013, p. 4). The work of Carter Heyward (1989, 2010) helps me to acknowledge these tensions and apparent contradictions I hold as my inner self expresses herself outwards. The contradictions of hope and despair; of terror and joy; anger and compassion; humanity and divinity as embodied in Christ(a) but also embodied within my own self. These are what Heyward describes as the "dynamic dimensions of Queerness" (2010, p. 15). The encouragement that our contradictions are not limitations but are rather a "mutually interactive dynamic of human being and divine being which work together in us and make us whole" (Heyward, 2010, p. 15).

The work of Mary Grey (1989, 1997a, 1997b, 2009) offers hope and prophetic imagery for the Church. She writes of the "dark night of the Church" and the need for the Church to reimagine herself (1997a, 1997b). Grey offers a brave theology of praxis and experience for Church by developing the concept of "Relational Theology" (1997a, p. 27), where the "basic structure of human person is relational" (Ibid, p. 23). This praxis

embraces the vulnerability of God as an essential motif for the becoming Church: where "God is vulnerable, to be discovered in the soil of our vulnerability to each other" (Grey, 1997a, p. 58). Grey's work provides a theological accompanier for my own ministerial journey. She provides a 'pinprick' of light to guide and encourage me as I wrestle with my own 'dark night'.

So I come to this research with a strong conviction for a social gospel; a belief that God has a "preferential option for the poor" (Boff, 1988, p. 23). I come as someone who finds herself on the margins of mainstream ecclesiology and who struggles to find her own place within the main body of the Church. I am a feminist and so will always seek to prioritise the voice of women [14] and ensure they have an equal place at the table where decisions and conversations about their lives are held and made. These are all motivating factors for my research and as such will mean that I will interpret and understand data in a particular way; through the lens of my own experience and epistemology.

I came to Bootle with a real thirst for the Church being able to make a difference to the lives of the community. I was hopeful that I would be able to embody an incarnational ministry amongst 'the poor'. The fact that the streets were boarded-up and the church had trees growing out of the roof excited me! I felt here I could do something, here I could make a difference. That this is where Christ(a) would have been, alongside those in the boarded-up streets.

However, as I began my work in Bootle, I discovered a vacuum of theological thought and intent and I felt isolated and discouraged in my ministry. I was

[14] The prioritizing of women's voice and experience is a primary task of feminist theology (King, 1989; Graham, 2009a; Ruether, 1983; Schüssler Fiorenza, 1983, 1993). "This is sometimes known as the 'advocacy' or 'standpoint' position, or the 'praxis' or 'empowerment' principle" (Slee, 2003, p. 7) and is understood to enable a challenge to the dominance of androcentric and patriarchal reason and thought embedded in our faith practices, culture and tradition (Christ, 2002; Daly, 1973; Hampson, 1990). Where, "women's experience is called upon as both source and norm in feminist theory" (Slee, 2003, p. 5).

ministering in a very evangelical Diocese and was struggling to find my place and even hear my own voice. Instead of feeling encouraged and inspired by my Anglican tradition, I felt there was a resounding silence and a lack of appetite to want to engage with a church and people who were living on the margins. I felt I was running on empty and was desperate to find a theological praxis that could help accompany me on my journey. I needed some 'manna' for the soul! Surely God had not abandoned the poor. Surely God was interested in the lives and experiences of the women and men in Bootle. Where was the Gospel to be found? Where was this living water and life in all her flourishing?

At the end of the book *The Wounded Healer* (1979), Nouwen offers this story from the Talmud:

> Rabbi Yoshua ben Levi came upon Elijah the prophet … he asked Elijah, 'When will the Messiah come?' Elijah replied,
> 'Go and ask him yourself.'
> 'Where is he?'
> 'Sitting at the gates of the city.'
> 'How shall I know him?'
> 'He is sitting among the poor covered with wounds.'
> (Nouwen, 1979, pp.81-82)

I was convinced that it would be within the storied experience of the women from Bootle that this life in all her flourishing could be found. That embodied in their lives and experiences I would meet with the living, wounded risen Christ(a). It would be the women from Bootle, those that were marginalised, those from whom society said, "nothing good can ever come" (Morisy, 2004, p. 82) that a new feminist theological praxis for urban church would be defined. And so I began my research quest to uncover the stories, the hidden leaven of the white working-class women from Bootle.

Chapter 2. Prelude: The other actors on the stage

> It is three days after the feast of the Epiphany and I have managed to find just a crack of time to write and reflect on my thesis. The Epiphany, God's revelation to the world. I wonder what small revelation this thesis is going to make, what pinprick of light it will illuminate in the whole scheme of things? Faithfully I come and write, guided less by a star but more by the pressing need to get the thing done! So, it is here I begin again and hope that in the writing, the journaling, the wrestling a blessing from God may be provoked and something of her presencing made known. (Research Journal, 11th January 2016)

I have found writing this thesis somewhat akin to a theatrical production. The Main Performance consists of the storied voices of the twelve white working-class women from Bootle and the Gift of Leaven that they bring. But there are other "actors" (Latour, 2005) on the stage who need introducing. They are from across several disciplines reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of this research project.

The first 'actor' to find her way onto the stage is Grace Jantzen (1984, 1999, 2004, 2009). She walks on boldly and offers a 'new horizon' to the predicament I am finding in the urban. She explores with me her theory of natality (Jantzen, 2004) and I grasp at the hope that it may offer me, the possibility of a new beginning and flourishing in the brokenness of the community of Bootle.

I need some "road metal" (Forrester, 2005), something on which I can lay tarmac and begin to make inroads into the hard-unforgiving urban soil. It is the feminist school of practical theology that then joins Grace Jantzen on the stage. They share a *phronēsis*, a practical wisdom and talk of a transforming

liberative praxis. The women that have gone before Slee (2003, 2004, 2011, 2013, 2014, 2015), Graham (1996, 2009a, 2009b, 2014), Walton (2003, 2007, 2014), Miller-McLemore (1993, 1994, 2014), Clark-King (2003, 2004), McBeath (2006) and Bons-Storm (1996), to name only a few, share their own stories and offer a practical guide as to how to "hear the women into speech" (Morton, 1985).

There are other actors now wanting to get on the stage, voices from Mujeristic theology offer the *lo cotidiano* (Isasi-Díaz, 2002), the ordinary and everyday place of the experience of women's lives. Urban geographers Leonie Sandercock (2003) and Doreen Massey (2001, 2005) explore 'songlines' [15] and how the land can speak of memory and future hope. Sarah Pink (2012, 2015), Bruno Latour (2005), Lefebvre (1991, 2014) and de Certeau (1988) give voice to spatial turns, assemblages and associations, moments, and "the God of little things''(Kearney & Kristeva, 2016, p. 95).

"The drama of creation" (Graham & Lowe, 2009, p. xx) is where public urban theologies and practices jostle with each other, trying to make sense of the changing social and political urban landscape. The stories of the women enter a long tradition of the Church struggling to find her place in the urban. The tendrils of a new rhizomatic public urban theology (Baker, 2009, 2013; Ruddick, 2016; Shannahan, 2010; Watson, 2017) begin to emerge from the "cracks and crevices" (Baker, 2013 p. 4). The drama of creation is now unfolded, and the women can begin to speak.

2. 1 A new horizon

It is from Grace Jantzen's (1984, 1999, 2004) philosophical theology that I generate a new horizon and vantage point from which I can begin again to

[15] 'Songlines' is an Aboriginal term for the reading of the land (Sandercock, 2003, p. 61). Sandercock argues that there needs to be a place for songlines within the design of a city, where stories can be kept alive and the memories of the past transformed into future possibilities (2003, p. 227).

see the possibility of life amidst the despair and fragmentation of my urban community. Jantzen's first publication was *God's World, God's Body* (1984) in which she developed an embodied theology of human personhood. Her work was one of deconstructing the powerful yet often hidden androcentric knowledge from which much of Western theology has been generated. Once deconstructed, Jantzen then sought to transform it; she would "read against the grain of the present in order to redeem it" (Graham, 2009b, p. 3). Central to Jantzen's work is a philosophical reading of the world that embraces at its heart the seed of natality.

Jantzen's theory of natality was heavily influenced by the work of French philosopher Hannah Arendt (Jantzen, 2004, p. 38; Jantzen, 1999, p. 44). "With the creation of man [sic], the principle of beginning came into the world …" (Arendt, 1958, p. 177). Arendt's emphasis on beginnings was important to Jantzen as it stressed that human beings are essentially natal and the fact that we are natal, a beginning means we are free to make fresh starts and do new things (Jantzen, 1999, p. 145).

In *Becoming Divine* (1999) Jantzen uses Arendt to deconstruct the male philosophies of Heidegger and Sartre with their emphasis on loneliness, isolation and violence (Graham, 2009b, p. 5; Jantzen, 1999, p. 149). Jantzen's own theory of natality is then generated by embodying Arendt's focus on possibility and newness as determined by the "web of life into which each 'natal' comes …" (Jantzen, 1999, p. 149). It is therefore creativity and the possibility of new beginnings that Jantzen asserts in place of violence and mortality which more often defines our human condition: "Indeed, as violence is a central symptom of necrophilia, so, I suggest beauty and its creation is central to natality" (Jantzen, 2004, p. 39).

Jantzen is concerned with our preoccupation with necrophilia. She argues that this has led to the causation of repression and anxiety and our need to fantasise, make ourselves immortal as a relief or escapism from our impending doom. This is symbolised in the Western desire for a belief in life

after death, a pursuit of eternal youth and the doctrines of salvation. Against this Jantzen pursued in her work an "alternative ethic of natality [which recognised both] our fragility [and] our interdependence" (Graham, 2009b, p. 5). She sought a new "divine horizon" (Jantzen, 1999, p. 157) in which the idiom of salvation gives way and new models for human flourishing could be realised.

In *Foundations of Violence* (2004) Jantzen develops her poetics of natality to replace "the necrophilia of the western symbolic" (p. 35). Jantzen defines natality as having four particular characteristics (2004, pp. 36-38):

i) Embodiment. Focusing the attention on human flourishing in this world as opposed to preparing our souls for "some other world" (Ibid, p. 37).
ii) That "all natals are gendered" (Ibid).
iii) Our particularity. "It is not possible to be born alone: there must be at least one other person present …" (Ibid). We are known by being in relationship with another.
iv) Hope is the final feature of natality engendering a creative approach to issues of suffering and violence: "With each new infant, new possibilities are born" (Ibid, p. 38).

Jantzen holds the argument that the Western obsession with mortality and the ending of life has led to the "dominance of the phallus, a masculinist imaginary which renders the becoming of the woman subject, if not wholly impossible, at least fraught with ambiguity and partiality" (1999, p. 128). This has led to the repression of women's voice, their embodied experience and ultimately their flourishing. Jantzen's argument is that, "by careful listening, it is possible to hear [the voices] again; and by exploring their possibilities, find resources for transforming and redeeming the present and bringing newness into the world" (2004, p. 38). Graham identifies that key to Jantzen's work was not only a very clear refusal to embrace the habitus of necrophilia but also her commitment "to the telling of alternative stories

about women's religious experience and voices and the celebration of the radical possibility of life and beauty" (2009b, p. 3). Jantzen was determined in her work to develop an ethic for the human condition which was freed from the oppression and obsession of necrophilia and find a habitus "open to springs of newness and beauty" (2004, p. 11).

Jantzen asks the intellectual questions: "How can newness enter the world? [and] Where may we look to find the resources for redeeming the present?" (2004, p. 3). These intellectual questions connect with my own experience of urban church and the contextual questions with which I was wrestling as priest within the community of Bootle. Motivating my research quest was my own need to seek a theological companion to my task as parish priest. I needed some grit to add into the oyster and most of the time it was for mere survival rather than the desire to produce a pearl. In my own reflections I often wondered whether anything good could ever come from any of this: "My lived urban experience militates against hope as I walk through my community of empty streets, of ghostly homes and weep at the hopelessness of the situation" (Publishable Article, TH8003, July 2013, p. 12).

Following the realm of necrophilia there would be no hope to offer this community. When 'everything of value had been removed from the dwelling' this is then the end. The money for the regeneration had dried up and so the building of a new community by brick and mortar had become like the tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). Necrophilia, I argue, provides no hope, no redeeming of the present awfulness of the situation. However, as I read and studied Jantzen's work, I was beginning to see the possibility of a new horizon. I wondered too whether the voices of the women from the community could be this "resource for redeeming the present" (Jantzen, 2014, p. 3).

Jantzen's work was characterised by both a "diagnosis [and a] transformation" (Graham, 2009b, p. 3). Before the new the old order has to be un-constructed. This resonated with my physical context in Bootle. The

old had literally been pulled down and demolished. The question I was left with was whether it was possible for something new to be born, to be re-constructed?

> I walked down to see Janet … the wind is blowing over what is now a wide-open space of where homes and streets used to be. The words from Jeremiah that I have read in the quiet of the morning come back to me … promises of restoration for the wilderness (Jeremiah 33). On the far-side of the wilderness the last few streets of the old housing are beginning to be knocked down. The final remnant being reduced to rubble, 'earth to earth, ashes to ashes … but in sure and certain hope.' There is now a potential to begin again, make something for the now. (Research Journal, 28th August 2015)

Something new was needed in order that there may be flourishing and life. The search for this newness, this hope is what defines my research quest. Within the broken lives and broken community could there be flourishing and life? Was it paradoxically within the broken that new life and new beginnings could be found? Was this newness and flourishing to be found, as Jantzen suggests, by carefully listening to women's voices that had previously not been heard?

What Jantzen offers is a philosophical approach, a way of seeing the world differently, a 'new horizon', particularly for women marginalised through the oppressive androcentric philosophies of Western modernity. But the task must surely be about how to turn this philosophy into practice; how to embody this in our living. Graham concludes that Jantzen was insistent "that in order to act differently, we have to learn to think differently" (2009b, p. 18). However, there is a gap between Jantzen's philosophical thought and how natality may be lived out in our faith praxis. Whilst the theology of natality provides an intellectual and philosophical construct, it fails to connect with the very reality of women's lives and experiences, the sense that meaning is built from the place where we stand, and that knowledge is

generated from the practices of women and their lives. Graham suggests that "there is still a question as to whether the Western moral imaginary is theorised as effectively 'all in the mind' at the expense of the more through-going analysis of material, economic and technological manifestations of culture" (2009b, p. 18). It is therefore to the school of feminist practical theology that I now turn in order to bridge the gap between Jantzen's philosophical thought and the women's everyday experience.

Before journeying further, it may be helpful to try and define what I mean by 'flourishing'. [16] For the purpose of this research I am adopting Mary Grey's (2009) interpretation of flourishing in her article, *Natality and Flourishing in the Context of Disability and Impairment.*

> The English word 'flourish' is from the Latin, *florere,* French *flourir,* with associations of blossoming and beauty being evoked; a German synonym is *blühen*, or *gedeihen*, which is like the English word thrive … A Dutch equivalent is *bloeien*, (to blossom … to experience a time of blooming), or simply *leven*, (to be fully alive), with similar connotations of well-being and fullness of life. (Grey, 2009, pp. 197-198)

The concept of flourishing is deeply rooted to our connection with the earth and essentially means "all that is life giving" (Grey, 2009, p. 198). Yet, the challenges of life confound this reading of the word 'flourish'. I ask these questions: How can these streets and homes be brought back to life when everything of value has been removed from the dwelling? Where can life in all her flourishing be found? Grey has the same struggle in evoking "meaning out of despair" in the aftermath of the Rwanda genocide (Ibid, p. 201). Here the concept of flourishing still holds but shifts in emphasis to "its relevance for *bringing back the beauty of life"* (emphasis in the original; Ibid). Flourishing then becomes our attentiveness to being human and being

[16] There is not scope within this research to explore the theological concept of flourishing fully; for further explorations of flourishing see the edited book by Higton, Law & Rowland (2011).

vulnerable to each other's pains, being welcoming and treating each other with compassion.

> Even if we sink to the lowest level of our existence … if only we can hang onto our determination to keep diving back to the surface and keep living to the fullness of whichever we are capable … That is becoming, growing, even flourishing as we reflect God's image. (Grey, 2009, p. 211)

2.2 Road metal

> And from the quarry we also produce some rubble stones called *road metal* used for making firm, straight paths on which God's people can move forward. (Emphasis in the original; Forrester, 2005, p. 20)

Within this research project I was in need of some 'road metal' to make a pathway into the urban scene and excavate the leaven. I needed to bridge the philosophical gap between Jantzen's new horizon and my urban experience. Feminist practical theology has a high regard for the importance of women's experience as holding the *phronēsis* for generating new theological knowledge and insights; it is the "primacy of orthopraxis over orthodoxy" (Graham, 2009b, p. 13). Feminist practical theology affords me some road metal and suggests that it would be in the experience of the Bootle women, their *phronēsis*, that the hidden leaven could be found.

Whilst practical theology would seem to have shifted away from its original focus on pastoral studies and the direct work of the cleric in 'his' practice, it is "probably the theological discipline least influenced by feminist voices" (Ackermann & Bons-Storm, 1998, p. 1). In 1998 Ackermann and Bons-Storm edited *Liberating Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theologies in Context*. This was the first significant body of work to publish feminist practical theologians writing contextual theology. Since its publication there has been

a steadily growing corpus of influence and knowledge within practical theology that speaks specifically from the feminist tradition. This thesis is situated within this developing strand of feminist practical theology and makes an important contribution by the inclusion of voices from white working-class women.

In *Transforming Practice* (1996) Graham premises her writing by asking the question: "In the face of the collapse of the 'grand narrative' of modernity, what value may now inform purposeful Christian action and vision?" (p. 2). In light of this question, Graham then goes about reconstructing a "relevant but authentic practical wisdom" (Ibid, p. 3). Graham's sources and norms for pastoral theology are derived from liberation, feminist and narrative theologies, where narrative also attends to the important emphasis on women's experience (1996, pp. 112-113). These source norms are also congruent with my own. For the purpose of this research, I am therefore adopting Graham's interpretive model for transforming practice in which "the proper focus of pastoral theology is not the pastoral agent, or theological ethics, or applied theology, but the pastoral *practice* of the faith-community itself" (emphasis in the original; 1996, p. 7).

Graham (2009a) terms this 'fourth image' [17] of pastoral and practical theology as the notion of the "living human document" (p. 151) in which, pastoral agency lies not with the institution but is embodied in the lives and practices of the people of faith. "The praxis of faith-communities constitutes theology as a form of 'practical wisdom' [18] (*phronēsis*) which is mediated and embodied in the testimonies of the living human document" (Graham, 2009a, p. 152). It is these 'texts' of life, which are the area of interest for this particular study.

[17] The other three models for pastoral and practical theology are: therapeutic; missional; and liberative (Graham, 2009a, pp. 135-152).
[18] 'Practical wisdom' is a reflective theological method as outlined specifically by Graham, Walton and Ward (2005).

We essentially learn of a community's faith practices not by their doctrines of belief but by their faithful witness as they act out the principles of love and service. "Theology now becomes not an abstract series of philosophical propositions, but a performative discipline, where knowledge and truth are only realizable in the pursuit of practical strategies and social relations" (Graham, 1996, p. 204). Within this research the core values of communities and cultures are viewed not as transcendent eternal realities but as the embodied realities of the women's everyday practices (Graham, 1996). There is a danger that our theories can become separated from our embodied and gendered experience. Conde-Frazier (2006) makes a similar point that actions should be informed by critical reflection and that knowledge, new knowledge is generated from "wisdom or understanding from the inside" (p. 326). That the "relationship between subjects is important because when we separate every-day reality, 'lo cotidiano', from theory we create possibilities for oppressing others" (Conde-Fraser, 2006, p. 326). This research demonstrates that it is within the embodied practices, the indwelling *phronēsis* (Graham, 2009a, p. 152) of the Bootle women that a new liberative praxis, the Gift of Leaven for the whole community is to be discovered.

The understanding of praxis in relation to this study is perhaps best defined by Gutiérrez (1988) who states that, "liberating praxis endeavours to transform history in the light of the reign of God" (p. xxx). According to Gutiérrez to do theology on the praxis of liberation is to "limp after reality" (1988, p. 11). The whole essence of a praxis of liberation is that the meaning of revelation is in the praxis. A praxis that cannot be done "from an armchair; rather it means sinking [deep] roots [into the present] where the pulse of history is beating" (Ibid, p. 12). It is the present which "in its deepest dimensions, is pregnant with future" (Gutiérrez, 1988, p. 11). Gutiérrez's concept of praxis is deeply embedded within the heart of a God of love and goes beyond the purview of wrestling purely with the injustices of social and economic poverty (1988, p. xxi). Extending a vision of praxis to include "unimportant persons" (Ibid, p. xxx) Gutiérrez noticed "the

importance of gestures and ways of 'being with' that some may regard as having little political effectiveness" (Ibid). This research argues that it is through the lives and embodied reality and experience of the 'unimportant' women of Bootle that the full expression of the love of God is to be found.

Within feminist theology women's experience and specifically writing theology from the experience of women is an important motif. It was Nelle Morton's pioneering work in the 1970s that first constructed a women-centred approach to pastoral studies. Morton claimed that "all women's experiences are valid data and must be respected [and because of] the dominance of men in society, culture has confused the full human experience with the male experience" (1985, p. 126). Morton speaks of a "new imaging" that comes to birth through the validating of women's experience, through the hearing of one to another:

> 'You heard me. You heard me all the way.' Her eyes narrowed. She looked directly at each woman in turn and then said slowly: 'I have a strange feeling you heard me before I started. You heard me to my own story.' (Morton, 1985, p. 127)

"The uniqueness of feminist theology lies not in its use of the criterion of experience but rather in its use of *women's* experience, which has been almost entirely shut out of theological reflection in the past" (emphasis in original; Reuther, 1983, p. 13). Riet Bons-Storm cites "das schreckliche Schweigen" (the terrible silence) as the noted absence of women's perspectives from the world of pastoral care and counselling (1996, p. 31) and Miller-McLemore (1994) 'pulls' into the academy the life experience of mothering as an arena for theological reflection. From a British context Graham and Halsey (1993) specifically give voice to the experiences of women who are absent from theological discourses of pastoral care. Other writers also acknowledge that it is this writing of theology from a women's experience that forms the basis of the contribution feminist theology makes

to the wider academy (Ackermann, 1998, p. 79; Clark-King, 2004, p. 185; Graham, 2014, pp. 198-202; Johnson, 2002, p. 61-75).

However, there is a challenge of how actually to construct and write women's theology. Jantzen critiques Reuther for applying misogynist theology to her application of women's experience in adopting a patriarchally defined notion of what it is to be human (1999, p. 103). Perceiving religion to be "premised upon the Name of the Father [therefore, to even write religion women have to] use men's language, play by men's rules" (Ibid, p. 42). Following the school of French philosophical thought Hélène Cixous seeks to subvert the concept that language is essentially a masculine construct and urges that "woman must put herself into the text – as into the world" (1976, p. 876).

> I wished that women would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns might exclaim: I too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs. (Cixous, 1976, p. 876)

The notion of (w)riting like a woman is a theme that Slee (2014) develops claiming that, "in order to speak or think at all, the woman writer has to find a new language, make new maps, revise and reverse the patriarchal myths" (p. 19). This study intentionally seeks to take woman's own voice, their own individual story, as a habitus for theology. It is as Jantzen would term, "a feminist reinterpretation of incarnation, women's words writing with/in women's flesh, women becoming divine" (1999, p. 196).

> Write the body …
> Mouth her flesh into firm,
> choice words,
> full round-bellied.
> Let the body speak.
> (Slee, 2014, p. 9)

The intention of this study is to give voice to this 'body'; to 'write the body' into words. The 'body' for the purposes of this study is the body of 'true orthodoxy' to be found within the orthopraxis of the lives and experiences of the Bootle women.

Whilst the earlier work of Ackermann and Bons-Storm (1998) had sought to realise a feminist contextual practical theology, a notable shift in practice has been the work of Slee (2004) and Clark-King (2003, 2004) and specifically their use of a feminist qualitative research methodology. Clark-King (2003, 2004) importantly brings the lived experience of white working-class church going-women from the East End of Newcastle into the academy. More recently published works by Slee, Porter and Phillips (2013, 2018) contain a "significant gathering of a [growing] body of feminist qualitative research on the faith of women and girls within the British context" (2013, p. 2). This demonstrates the wider field of research into which this project is placed.

Clark-King's inclusion of the voices of white working-class women is particularly significant to my own research project. Clark-King's premise is that whilst the feminist tradition purports a theology from the underside of history, these voices were noticeably absent from the academy: "Feminist theology, in order to avoid becoming just another theology of the elite, needs to attend to the theology and spirituality of women outside the academy, and outside the feminist fold" (Clark-King, *Abstract*, 2003). It is from this place that a new "theology of the heart" begins to emerge based on the whole of the person and not just their intellect (Clark-King, 2004, p. 3). Clark-King (2003) interrogates Grace Jantzen's theory of natality and concludes that it leaves the East End women wanting. Jantzen's re-imaging of the concept of salvation by detaching oneself from the need to believe in an afterlife and focusing instead on one's capacity to engender flourishing in this world was at odds with the women's own narrated experiences of life and death.

> In Grace Jantzen's philosophy of natals … they [the women of the East End of Newcastle] seem to be squeezed out. A theology of finitude only offers hope for those who have sufficient power in this life to see the possibility of achievement and fulfilment. (Clark-King, 2004, p. 181)

I was now beginning to wonder whether Jantzen's theory had any merit at all. Clark-King demonstrates how important it is that qualitative research includes the voices of those whom the academy and ecclesiology tend to marginalise. When their voices are included, our norms and practices and middle-class assumptions are often challenged and found wanting. There is a need as Clark-King premised to ensure the inclusion of "voices that speak only on the margins of our society and at the limit of our ability to hear" (2003, p. 1). I felt motivated to continue my research quest and excavate further the important and particular contribution of new women's knowledge that the white-working class women of Bootle may bring to the academy.

This thesis is as much about "new ways of doing theology" (Slee, 2013, p. 13) as it is about unearthing new truths or knowledge. It is about the messiness of lived life experiences and how these lives can be held in creative tension and dialogue with voices from the academy. It is as Graham (2009a) muses, more like an act of "bricolage" (p. 154) than a systematic and clinical analysis of urban theological practices. It is messy with a series of dead ends and cul-de-sacs because life is messy and embodies its own dead ends and cul-de-sacs from which we try and locate ourselves and find meaning and purpose.

This thesis adopts a feminist qualitative methodological approach to the task of practical theological enquiry. This is a relatively new and undeveloped field within both practical theology and feminist theology (Slee, Porter & Phillips, 2013, pp. 1-2). Central to this thesis is the lived experience of twelve white working-class women from Bootle, where

experience, within feminist theology is *prima facie*. It is the stories of the women that become the text of life, from which the leaven is extracted. It is this leaven "'the first act' of theology, upon which the 'second act' of reflection is dependent" (Slee, 2004, p. 6).

What is considered next in this thesis is the 'face of the quarry' from where the leaven is to be extracted. This is the *lo cotidiano*, the immediate and everyday space of women's lives and is defined as much by the physical fabric of the community as it is by the relationships that the women embody.

2.3 Lo cotidiano

> To be human is to be placed: to be born in this house, hospital, stable (according to Luke) … It is to live in this council house … farmhouse, mansion. It is to go to school through these streets … to shop in this market … to work in this factory … These facts are banal, but they form the fabric of our everyday lives, structuring memories, determining attitudes. (Gorringe, 2002, p. 1)

As the women began to narrate their lives, the place that they inhabited took on a new sense of meaning. Much of the physical community had been knocked down: the school; the church; and the streets that they used to live in. However, their lives were narrated in and through their sense of place, the streets and lanes by which they went to school and the factory where they worked. De Certeau (1988) suggests that memory is a "sort of anti-museum … objects and words also have hollow places in which the past sleeps, as in the everyday acts of walking, eating and going to bed" (p. 108). The streets were now demolished but I could trace the ebb and flow of life as men and women went to and forth from home to factory.

Urban theorists draw on the concept of a 'spatial turn' [19] from the social sciences, in order to locate Christian discourses within this human reality of place (Cloke & Pears 2016b; Graham & Lowe, 2009; Green, 2003; McGrath, 2012; Shannahan, 2010). Essentially, they investigate how the making of our cities influences our capacity to be fully human and assert that "places are spaces of social relations" (Massey, 2001, p. 460). Inge (2003), Sheldrake (2001), Gorringe (2002), Tweed (2006) and Bergmann (2007, 2008) all develop their theologies through an orientation to this embodied concept of place; it is "through, in and with their natural and built environments human beings develop images of God (imago Dei) …" (Bergmann, 2007, p. 354). It is within the physicality of bricks and mortar that the women's lives are defined and orientated, orientated to each other in relationship and orientated to the divine.

Massey's account of *Living in Wythenshawe* (2001) embodies the physical reality of the place where she was brought up. Through the narration of the built environment Massey reveals the complexity and multiplicity of life in the urban, the physical nature of place being continually intersected by the immaterial architecture of social relations (2001, p. 463). In many respects Massey's account of the Wythenshawe Estate mirrors something of my experience of living within the Klondyke Estate; understanding the significance of place names (Massey, 2001, p. 461): Eleanor; Annie; Marion; Edith; and Elizabeth were all named after relatives of 'Klondyke' Jones. As in Wythenshawe, the names speak of the past and the social engineering of why the estate was first built. However, the "making of the estate goes on" (Ibid, p. 474), and the buildings and places become changed by the social relations within them. "In short, space is a practiced place. Thus the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 117).

[19] Developed through the work of Edward Sojo (2005)

> Although place is a human construct, it is equally vital not to lose sight of the fact that the natural features are part of the interrelationships that go to make up place … there is an interplay between physical geographies and geographies of the mind and spirit. (Sheldrake, 2001, p. 15)

What was evident from the stories of the women was the interplay between the everyday ordinary physical objects and the meaning making of their lives. The physical aspect of a place, the broken paving slabs, the shattered bus shelter and the milk on the doorstep become in themselves receptacles of memory (Massey, 2001); whether it was the old wooden floor of the church, the physical bricks and mortar of their home, or the front step. Lefebvre (1991) suggests how any object, a vase, a chair, a garment, can be displaced from its situation of everyday practice and transformed "into a monumental space: that vase will become holy, the garment ceremonial, the chair the seat of authority" (p. 225).

Richard Kearney and Julia Kristeva consider the singularity of God and from micro-eschatology "the god of little things" (2016, p. 95). That God or the "truth is not revealed in a universal ideal, nor in opaque matter but in 'this one' – this man here, this woman there; whence [the] notion … 'this', the demonstrative indexing of an unnameable singularity" (Ibid). I was beginning to frame the stories that were emerging from the urban around the ordinary and everyday objects of life. It is the singularity of these everyday objects that become 'monumental' objects in which the tracing of God's own imprint on the community can be found. Whilst there is a singularity and clarity about these objects, once held and examined they reveal a myriad of tendrils and associations, creating deep, rich and thick assemblages of the urban. The depth of these associations and the place of ordinary everyday objects as sites of revelation and new meaning is explored in greater depth in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Sarah Pink in her work *Situating Everyday Life* (2012) suggests that "everyday life" is not something that should be seen as static but is rather a dynamic and changing site (p. 28). Pink's (2012, 2015) ethnographic work offers an understanding of the local and global flows of life as situated within the ordinary and everyday elements of living, be it the kitchen sink, the laundry, the garden. It is from these very ordinary sites that new understandings and connections are made that become "the locus for a sustainable future" (Pink, 2012, p. 149).

Pink's work illustrates the dynamic and transformational place that everyday experiences can hold in being portals to our understanding of the culture and experiences of others. This research project takes the very ordinary experience of the women's everyday life be it 'a cuppa tea' or the meeting on the front step and uses these as generative portals. The women themselves becoming participants within their own research, they are "full subjects, actors and catalysts … for change. This change begins not in the esoteric confines of the abstract but with everyday life, in the realm of *lo cotidiano"* (Conde-Frazier, 2006, p. 321).

> As a community we are close. This street's been brilliant, I've been here nearly 17 years on this street, look out for everyone, kids and that, sit out at night and have a cuppa … So, community wise it's good. (Janet)

This is part of the narrative from Janet's transcript, it is within the ordinary and apparent 'banal' activities that fragments of life are gathered and new meanings are made. The 'cuppa' becomes a place, a "seat of relations or the place of meeting and activity in the interaction between God and the world" (Inge, 2003, p. 57). If you were to take a long look at our community, it would be easy to come to the conclusion that there is nothing of value here; it is just a wasteland. However, my proposition is that as we become "entangled" within the situational experiences of our study new meanings and insights emerge (Pink, 2012, p. 28).

The sight of the everyday as a place of revelation is something to which Miller-McLemore attends in the *Wiley Companion to Practical Theology* (2014). The first seven chapters are dedicated to exploring the realm of practical wisdom inherent within the everyday activities of: suffering; healing; playing; eating; loving; consuming; and blessing. Miller-McLemore "starts with the particular because this is the basic premise of practical theological knowing" (2014, p. 7).

Walton (2014) is also a strong advocate for the everyday as a place for theological reflection, where feminist practical theology is seen in particular as "a positive and generative theological paradigm that holds the commerce of everyday life in high regard" (p. 176). Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (2014) and the work of de Certeau (1988), Walton views the everyday as places of "poetic revelation" which hold the mundane, the fiesta, and the tragic (2014, p. 183). Within the particularity of everyday practices there is therefore a need to be "advocating a process of attentive engagement with things we may have perceived to be of little worth" (Walton, 2014, p. 184).

The women's 'everyday' stories are held in a complex web of the social and political fabric that defines the urban. Their lives are by no means linear; they are not narrated in a simplistic time-bound fashion from birth to the grave. Their lives are a mesh of interrelated stories and experiences that crisscross across the urban landscape. It is the *lo cotidiano*, the immediate space of women's lives (Isasi-Díaz, 2002, p. 8), in which these experiences can be located.

Lo cotidiano is drawn from the experience and work of Latina women and is an important place where the struggles for liberation are played out and given flesh. It is the place of women's ordinary and everyday experiences both physical and relational. It is a term that Isasi-Díaz (2002) readily acknowledges is difficult to define as it is trying to tie down in some

concrete way a space that is naturally fluid and evolving. *Lo cotidiano* "is necessarily entangled in material life and is a key element of the structuring of social relations and its limits" (Isasi-Díaz, 2002, p. 8). It is the first space in which women's experience is located and embraces a multitude of relations in which they can define themselves. "Lo cotidiano embraces our struggles and our fiestas, our birthing, living and dying … our loving and, tragically to our hating" (Isasi-Díaz, 2002, p. 17). This can be linked to what Bonnie Miller-McLemore terms the "living human web" (1993). It provides a "thick description" (Miller-McLemore, 1993, p. 369) and acknowledges that individual lives are not simply defined by their individual circumstance but are located within 'webs' of relationships that define the social.

I am now shifting in thinking "from matters of fact [to] matters of concern" (Latour, 2005, p. 114). Rather than viewing the social as a linear metanarrative (matter of fact), Latour (2005) reads the social as a horizontal set of interactions and assemblages (matters of concern). In Latour's defining theory, the Actor Network Theory [ANT] (2005) agency is given to both non-human and human actors. The social is defined as a series of associations, which can be traced between the human and non-human actors, the material and non-material elements bringing them together in a "complex series of assemblages" (Baker, 2013, p. 2). The name Actor Network *Theory* suggests a social *theory* but ANT is less of a theory *about* the social and more of a way of understanding or seeing the social. ANT is namely the deep connectivities that exist between human and non-human actors. ANT can be identified through everyday objects that create new assemblages of relationships that define and shape a person's experience. During the women's interviews interruptions were common: a knock on the door; a neighbour calling round for some sugar; the dog panting. These interruptions are part of the assemblages of associations. They are the crossing point bringing the reflections of life past into the reality of the present and indicating the wider web of social relations within which the women's lives are situated.

Sandercock (2003) and Greed (1994, 2011) both make the point that, although women make up a large percentage of the population, they are least heard within the corridors of urban planning. The fact that for the majority of time it is women who live in the houses seems to have been overlooked in the design and planning of communities. In the design of the new community there was no thought by the planners as to how the women would live out their "everyday life" (Greed, 2011, p. 111). In the old community the front step formed an important place; it was where the women sat and had conversations or simply watched the world go by. The new houses have been designed without the step, they have front and back gardens, but there is no "seat of relations" (Igne, 2003) where lives can meet, and stories can be shared.

Sandercock (2003) questions how planners arrive at places of knowing and truth, how they decide on decisions in the mapping and the planning of our cities and suggests there is a need to create new ways of knowing. Citing Aboriginal culture and how their history is passed on through the oral tradition of story-telling, song, dance and ceremony, Sandercock proposes that there is a need to see and feel the land, to let the history of the land speak, to allow for "the seeing through feeling, the *le-an* of Aboriginal culture" (Sandercock, 2003, p. 61). It is a way of knowing, seeing and reading the physical landscape in a way that speaks about history and life, creating a "Songline" (Ibid, p. 228). It was along a labyrinth of invisible paths that the "Aboriginals travelled to perform all the activities that are distinctly human – song, dance, marriage. The Songlines in Aboriginal culture are what sustains life" (Ibid, pp. 228-229).

Sandercock advocates within planning for a departure from the school of enlightenment and the "heroic model of Rational Man" (2003, p. 65). Drawing on the work of Donald Schön (1983), Sandercock links the need of planners to "see through feeling" with that of Aristotle's practical wisdom and *phronēsis* (2003, p. 61). Sandercock advocates strongly the need for planners to listen to their communities to "tune into oral traditions, such as

storytelling [to pay] attention to peoples' stories [as a way of] validating their knowledge and moving forward to a situation of mutual learning through respect for that knowledge" (2003, p. 77).
My contention in Bootle is that people, and women in particular, were ignored within the planning process. Consultation was piecemeal and ineffectual, despite it being a key element of the local authority's responsibility (National Audit Office, 2007). Promises were made that neighbour would move with neighbour and that houses would be exchanged 'like for like'. In reality promises were broken, and an entire community was fractured and displaced. The HMRI process displaced local people and built very little (Minton, 2009, pp. 101-103). The beneficiaries, as Davey (2002, p. 90) also identifies were the homebuilders who had lucrative contracts with the local council. Here in Bootle were poor people being 'done to'. I am convinced that the planners would not have 'got away' with such an appalling scheme in the more prosperous area of Formby or Southport. In Bootle people did not really matter, nobody really cared; nobody was prepared to stand up for them and fight their corner.

There was very little flourishing within my urban parish. There was "weeping and a gnashing of teeth" (Luke 13:28 [New Revised Standard Version]) but little joy or celebration. I wondered as to where God, life in all her flourishing, may be found in our urban community. The regeneration scheme had dismantled and fractured so much of the physical and relational fabric of the community. Greed (1994, 2011) and Sandercock (2003) argue that women's experience has been excluded and written out of the planning processes and advocate for the need to recover women's experience by 'seeing and feeling' the land. This research prioritises women's experience and the recovery of the hidden voices of the women from Bootle. It is as the women are heard into speech that songlines can be traced within the community in which story, lament and laughter are narrated. It is from these hidden stories that the leaven is extracted; the leaven is situated within the ordinary everyday, the *lo cotidiano* of the women's lives.

I am writing now during the season of Advent and am struck as I write of how human geographies of space and place also mimic, the incarnation of God, her coming in human flesh to dwell with us. This indwelling of God, in the incarnation of Christ(a), signifies her physical and divine being as simultaneously housed within the fabric of an earthly dwelling. Bergmann suggests our need to consider: "How and where does God take place and what happens? Where does the Holy Spirit make herself a home?" (2008, p. 82). We cannot consider the place of church, *ecclesia*, a home for where Christ(a) dwells if we do not consider the fabric of the environment in which we are seeking to find her.

2.4 The drama of creation

The term 'public' urban theology is used rather loosely and subjectively and implies, as Slee (2015) argues, that "feminist theology … is always and must always be public theology … [speaking] honestly and concretely from its own location and experience" but with a relevance beyond the bounds of its own context (pp. 15-16). To this extent this research project is deeply contextual and speaks 'honestly and concretely' out of the Bootle experience but with an application and relevance beyond Bootle within *ecclesia* and the academy.

Public urban theology has developed out of and is grafted into liberation theology; and is synonymous with the works of Gutierréz (1988, 1991), Boff (1988, 1992) and Sobrino (1985, 2008). Following the principle of a "preferential option for the poor" (Boff, 1988, p. 23), liberation theology is one of the influences through which many current liberative practices have emerged: black theology; feminist and womanist theology; and a theology for disability and sexuality. Liberation theology insists that the entry point of all theology has to be a "prior commitment to the poor" (Sheppard, 1983, p. 146). The challenge for liberative theologies is to be able to shift the

paradigm from being "a theology *for* the poor to being a theology *of and from* the poor" (emphasis in the original; Graham, 2009a, p. 227).

There is a strong biblical imperative for a 'bias to the poor', embodied in the ministry and practices of Jesus Christ [20] and inherent within the Levitical codes of the Hebrew Scriptures. [21] It is a preferential option for the poor, which does not mean the exclusion of the rich but simply that priority should be that of the poor. "God has mercy on the poor so that through them he can save the rich too" (Moltmann, 2000, p. 233).

It is important that 'the poor' are not seen as the disempowered, the ones to be pitied. There is an imperative mutuality and reciprocity at the heart of liberation theology, something that Sobrino attends to in his work *No Salvation outside the Poor* (2008). It is only as we properly understand that our own humanity can only be complete if we allow ourselves to receive the facets of truth and Gift of Leaven that the poor bring, or, for the purpose of this research, that the women of Bootle bring. "The reason is that the world of the poor places us before a mystery, and they themselves express a mystery" (Sobrino, 2008, p. 72). Something of this 'mystery' is expressed by Vanier as he describes an encounter in which "sometimes the greatest resources of all can be a small gesture of kindness from someone who is poor" (1979, p. 185):

> One day I went … to a slum in Bangalore … the sores stank and, humanly speaking, it was revolting. But the people there had a light in their eyes … the expressions and smiles of the people seemed to

[20] Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Luke 6:20a) and from the synagogue: "… to bring good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18 [New Revised Standard Version]). Jesus' practices and concern for: the Samaritan women (John 4:9); tax collectors (Luke 19:5); the healing of the lepers (Luke 10:11-19) and the bleeding woman (Luke 8:43).

[21] "Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land'" (Deuteronomy 15:11 [New Revised Standard Version]) and God's instruction not to harvest to the very edge of the field but "to leave them to the poor and the alien" (Leviticus 19:10 [New Revised Standard Version]).

> reach right into me and renew me … they touched me … they changed something in me. (Vanier, 1979, pp. 185-186)

This Gift of Leaven, this mystery was something I was also experiencing. Dawn's story was a story full of terror and darkness, yet her story also offered profound revelations and taught me what it was to flourish and hold onto the smallest of threads. I remember as I left Dawn's house that I felt 'changed' as Vanier had, I felt more complete, more whole. It was a feeling and as such difficult to explain; I think that Dawn had revealed to me something of the mystery of God, a revelation that, as Sobrino (2008) and Vanier (1979) would profess, can only be given to us by the poor.

> Dawn's story, life enriches all our lives, makes us whole. When her story is absent, we are less … I feel more engaged more alive because I have listened to Dawn, like honouring my own life script as well, together we are heard … in your life I also find something of my own life and am blessed. (Research Journal, 21st July 2015)

Caution needs to be muted here in a tendency to over-romanticise 'the poor'. Sobrino is attentive to this particularly in reflecting upon "the utopia of the kingdom … [essentially] the poor are oppressed. They are deprived of life and livelihood" (Sobrino, 2008, p. 81). Green also acknowledges that "any observer must admit that so often the power of death conquers in the city … [and that] after all the noise and hope, things largely stay as they are" (2010, p. 102). There is nothing romantic about urban poverty; it degrades life and livelihoods. Yet there is also 'a presence' within the poor which is difficult to explain; there are "thin places … where the gap between the obvious and the mystery is wafer-thin" (Green, 2010, p. 102). Essentially, the poor are not a commodity and should not be treated as such; their voices are important because of their humanity not because they are poor.

Within public urban theology there is a tension between the Church attending to a 'bias to the poor' and a Church 'driven for success'. Baker

(2013) argues that the "institutional church has largely lost interest in the questions surrounding urban mission, urban theology and urban research" (p. 3) and is far more concerned with matters of numerical growth (Newman, 2011; Cloke & Pears, 2016b, p. 3). The Church seeming to have metamorphosed from an agenda of "a bias to the poor [to an agenda with] a bias to growth" (Newman, 2011).

In adopting the 'growth agenda' the Church of England as an institutional Church has prioritized the need for personal conversion over the Church's civic role or need to maintain a faithful presence within urban communities. This theological tension between concern for the welfare of society and concern for the welfare of the individual soul can be traced back to Augustine and his writing, the *City of God* (2003). Graham and Lowe (2009) set out this tension as the "virtues of citizenship versus discipleship" (p .3), asking essentially whether "the Gospel call[s] Christians to seek 'the common good' and to immerse themselves in wider society" (Ibid, p. 2), or to build up the distinctiveness of Christian values. These two trajectories of a Christian social ethic are termed by Graham and Lowe as "a 'public' urban theology [and an] 'ecclesial' theology" (2009, p. 2) respectively. This tension is also picked up by Andy Wier (2015) but, rather than seeing the two silos of liberal social engagement and personal salvation as separate and competing, he prefers to see the potential tension created as a ground for further engagement in the "complex and messy" nature of urban ministry (2015, p. 20).

The Diocese of Liverpool is committed to making a "Bigger Church to make a Bigger Difference" (The Diocese of Liverpool, 2013). Bigger implies stronger, fitter, more powerful; and this is at odds with the reality of the urban church that is struggling to survive within the complexity and poverty of urban life. It is here, in the mess and poverty, that I argue you would find Christ(a) "sitting among the poor covered with wounds" (Nouwen, 1979, p. 82). There is an imperative for the Church to be attentive to its practices so as not to develop methods that reinforce notions of power and strength and

growth at the expense of being vulnerable and compassionate towards those living within marginalised communities. Fraser (2017) laments the fact that "successful churches [are those characterised as] whizzy Alpha course churches beloved by London bishops and their growth spread sheets". In poor parishes, Fraser acknowledges that the very task of simply keeping the doors open and the lights turned on is task enough (2017).

Chris Baker's (2013) analogy of urban theology as both rhizomatic and arborescent is a helpful picture for framing my own predicament and also suggesting that when the institutional Church is not listening or responding, rhizomatic ministries emerge and, dare I say, flourish! Baker (2013) adopts his terminology from the French philosopher Deleuze (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987): arborescent urban theology is related to a secular reading of society and is characterised as a tree, it is hierarchically produced and is aligned to the institution; whereas rhizomatic urban theology is linked to the concept of a tuber, a rhizome, and has a tendency to emerge in the "cracks and crevices beyond the purview of both institutional church and theology" (Baker, 2013, p. 4). Baker claims that rhizomatic urban theology is best placed in being able to "create new assemblages of events, discourses and practices" (2013, p. 4). It is linked with a postsecular [22] reading of society, to "third space thinking" (Baker, 2009), "blurred encounters" (Reader, 2005), and the liminality of space and place that exists within our "hybrid city" (Baker, 2009).

In terms of an arborescent urban theology, *Faith in the City* (ACUPA, 1985) is perhaps the most recognized contribution of the Church of England. Over time *Faith in the City* (ACUPA, 1985) has been seen as a "watershed" in the institutional Church's response to the structural inequality within society

[22] Postsecular is a contested term for it implies that society was at one stage secular. It can also be defined as "postmodernity, late (or reflective) secularism, liquid modernity, post industrialism … and the like" (Atherton, Baker & Reader, 2011, p. xxii). However, there is general consensus that society has shifted space and the place that religion holds within the public square is fluid and evolving. It is not possible within the remit of this thesis to explore postsecular in depth. For further exploration see: *Christianity and the New Social Order* (Atherton, Baker & Reader, 2011); Postsecular Cities (Beaumont & Baker, 2011); and linking to new humanism and anatheism *Reimagining the Sacred* (Kearney, 2015).

and the plight of the urban poor (Graham, 2009a, p. 191). Here was the institutional Church emphatically defending the rights of the poor as a priority. Whilst reigniting the Church's mission to the urban poor, the report sadly failed to leave any lasting legacy; for by the time of its publication, it was "already an anachronism" as the world and Britain had moved on (Graham & Lowe, 2009, p. 27).

Following on from *Faith in the City* (ACUPA, 1985) there was a rise in optimism in the development of British urban theology. Two particular texts were published: *Urban Theology: A Reader* (1998) edited by Michael Northcott, and *God in the City* (1995) edited by Peter Sedgwick. Northcott's edited compilation is a weighty text and includes articles from conceivably all the main writers and thinkers within urban theology. *God in the City* (1995) was a recognition that there was a need to ground this 'academic' work in stories from the urban.

God in the City (1995) framed the urban through the theological lens of sin, redemption, and salvation (Ibid, p. xviii). "We recognise the pain of life without paid employment for many people, but we believe that community and personal life can be changed" (Sedgwick, 1995, p. xix). Primarily life could be changed through the love and divine energy of the Church. It is an optimistic book which reflected the boon in liberative theology of the time, but which sadly failed to deliver the full transformation of life that it sought. I cannot help thinking that the book would have been better without the imposed theological lens. It was moulding the urban experience into hierarchically produced theological concepts which had not served the urban well and had to some extent maintained, and even exacerbated, the divisions, "privileg[ing] the powerful and disadvantag[ing] the vulnerable" (Cloke & Pears, 2016b, p. 4).

In 2006 the Commission for Urban Life and Faith produced *Faithful Cities*. The report speaks of a "regeneration industry" (CULF, 2006. p. v) in which the Church finds its place in the city by its involvement in and with new

partnership programmes. Tensions are noted between the Church's "expectations of its partnerships for social regeneration and welfare, and its prophetic voice through its continued and transformative presence in the poorest marginalised communities" (Davey, 2010, p. x). Graham (2009a) questions whether "an institution that owes its very existence to political and civil compromise [can espouse] a radical vision of an alternative human community [arguing that] theologies of the city risk endorsing 'signs of the times' without fully appreciating the provisionality and partiality of even such secular visions" (Graham, 2009a, p. 205).

In 2008 the banking crisis radically changed the Church's method for engagement in urban areas, no longer could the Church 'piggyback' onto regeneration programmes for its *modus operandi*. The Church had now entered into a wilderness phase and was left with profound questions as to what its place was within the city. In Bootle this question was felt most acutely as the very fabric of our urban community had been dismantled. It is quite clear that the arborescent urban theology had failed to provide either a working praxis for urban church or any clear mandate for how the Church should organise its engagement. We live now in what can be defined as a "post-regeneration era" (O'Brien & Matthews, 2016, p. 1). The imposed austerity agenda of local governments and the pulling of all publicly funded projects and services has left a vacuum within our urban communities. There is an opportunity for new and fresh ways of engagement but only, if as Church, we are able to clearly articulate a method, a theological praxis for this engagement.

Current urban theorists are beginning again to recognise the need to reprioritise urban ministry with the poor and allow theory to develop out of urban communities (Cloke & Pears, 2016a, 2016b; Pears, 2013). An example of this is Chris Shannahan's (2010) creative work with disaffected black teenagers and urban pop music, which maps out "from the 'bottom-up'" (p. 14) a "new urban Christology of Liberative Difference" (p. 241). Shannahan (2010) argues that the "'top-down' urban theory of the academy has become

disengaged from the lives and the challenges it analyses" (p. 14). His main critique of British urban theology is their "insular … 'top-down' [and] debilitating camp mentality … [which] has led us down theological and theoretical dead ends" (2010, p. 245). Shannahan claims that "existing patterns of urban theology fail to engage convincingly with twenty-first-century urbanism" (2010, p. 246). What is needed is "an urban theology that reconfigures a divine bias to the oppressed to recognise the multiple nature of contemporary oppression" (Ibid, p. 244).

To stem the tide of a Church that views mission only in terms of its own expansion and growth, Cloke and Pears suggest there is a need to see mission as "'encounter' [suggesting] a re-configuration of mission as a mutual relational embrace" (2016b, p. 5); where mission should be approached as a "two way exchange of gifts [or of] being open to be evangelised by those who we are evangelising" (Bevans & Schroeder, 2011, pp. 20-22). Cloke and Pears' argument is that the Church has had a tendency to import missional ideas and concepts into marginalised places without any reference to the context or culture concerned. They bemoan the fact that British urban theology has been slow to respond to the changing dynamics of the city, leaving it "bereft of a clear and critical analytical framework" (Cloke & Pears, 2016b, p. 18). Cloke and Pears strongly emphasise the need within practical theology to have research that is authentically rooted within marginalised communities and "earthed in the conditions, events and experiences of the marginalised people concerned" (2016a, p. 1).

Pears (2013) provides some flesh to what "incarnational expressions" for urban church may look like when defined from the "bottom-up" (p. 99). His model is drawn from the situational activities and stories of four contextualized practices in the urban. Arguing for a way of "'doing theology' amongst marginalised communities [so as] to make space for voices that are not often heard" (Pears, 2013, p. 89), Pears (2013) advocates for "doing things with people rather than to people" (p. 104), and for engaging with

communities as "listeners and learners [as opposed to seeing communities as] 'problems' that need 'fixing'"(p. 101). This research builds on the work of Cloke and Pears (2016a, 2016b) and Pears (2013) by looking beyond the observance of contextualized practice to developing a qualitatively based research project that engages the actual voices of those living in a marginalised community.

The work of Clare McBeath (2009) resonates strongly with my own experience of church in the urban through her development of a 'bottom-up' contextual urban theology from her experience as priest in an inner-city church in Manchester. The church, in McBeath's context, was as "stressed and depressed" as the community in which it could be found (2009, p. 147). Conversely, this then enables the fostering of a sense of mutuality in which people are not seen as the subjects of pastoral encounters but as "people with valuable experiences that can minister to us" (Ibid, p. 156). McBeath struggles to find and articulate signs of hope amidst what she terms a "collective malaise/depression [of the inner-city church] struggling to rise from the ashes of its past" (Ibid, p. 147). "In local–authority speak, we are looking for regeneration, although we might put this into more theological language of looking for signs of resurrection in the midst of crucifixion" (Ibid). Through McBeath's work I can hear strands of Grace Jantzen filtering through: in the nature of the very grounded embodied incarnational experience of both church and community; in the myriad tentacles of relationships holding the fragility of people and their sense of personhood and place; and in the hope that is so difficult to find in the 'collective malaise'. McBeath seeks to embody a practice that embraces the fullness of the "diversity of human creativity and experience" specifically the experience of mental illness (Ibid, p. 156). She was straining towards an ideal of flourishing for her community and congregation and wondering where 'the patronus charms' might be found:

> Harry Potter produces a patronus charm that not only saves him but saves those around him too. Where are the patronus charms, the

> creative responses to difficult life experiences, in our congregations, that drive out apathy and despair and allow life to flourish? (McBeath, 2009, p. 156)

I too was asking the same questions of my small community in Bootle. I was left wondering as to what this flourishing might be, or whether it is just a utopian ideal. I could appreciate now why my research project was so important. There was a sense, as demonstrated by McBeath's work and also present within many writings on urban ministry, that the best our urban theology could do was simply to present what is broken and vulnerable. What I wanted to do in this research project was to dig further into the soil of the urban and try to excavate some of the hidden leaven and voices behind the stories. I wanted more than "crumbs of hope" (McBeath, 2006). What I needed in my ministerial practice was a theory, a practice, a theology that would look beyond the awfulness of the urban situation and enable me to embody a liberative practice of flourishing. I was still convinced there was something hidden in the urban, some 'treasure' needing to be found; something outside of the view of organised religion and theology that could be found in the fragments and stories of the women and their everyday practices. I wondered what Grace Jantzen would make of it all; I wondered where she would discern the 'new horizon' and the possibility of creativity and beauty. I was in essence tired of a ministry marked only by crucifixion that offered little joy and promise. The question I was now asking myself was: Could the tools offered by a feminist qualitative research project enable flourishing to be found?

Baker's (2013) notion of rhizomatic urban theology offers slightly more hope to my urban context. Examples of rhizomatic urban theology include: work within the area of rapprochement as developed by Cloke, Beaumont and Williams (2013); the work of the Eden Project [23] as documented through the research and work of Anna Ruddick (2016); Paul Ede's (2013) work from a Pentecostal charismatic tradition, on eco-urbanism and the

[23] The Eden project is an evangelical organisation which seeks to live and build community in poor neighbourhoods.

interplay with the healing of the land as an authentic witness for the body of Christ; and Derek Watson's (2017) work with visual ethnography as a way of interrupting the urban scene. "Andy Wier's (2013, 2015) new model of practical charismatic-evangelical urban social ethics (PCE-USE) tries to hold the arborescent and the rhizomatic in a creative and sustainable tension" (Baker, 2013, p. 11). From these examples it is clear that rhizomatic urban theology cuts across all disciplines and traditions of the Christian Church. It seems that whilst the arborescent established Church was sleeping, rhizomatic networks of a new expression of urban church had come to life through the "cracks and crevices" (Baker, 2013).

This research falls into the rhizomatic camp of urban theology. It speaks out of, and into, the vacuum of a post-regeneration urban community where regeneration policies and programmes have failed. It inhabits this liminal space that is unfolding as current theories and practices grapple with the changing face of the city. It is from this "purposive threshold" (Baker & Reader, 2009) that this research defines a new feminist theological praxis for urban church.

Graham (2009a) outlines a particular role of practical theology in being able to "'speak truth to power' and adopting an advocate's role, providing a framework through which the anger and passion of those on the margins can be expressed" (p. 236). The hope is that this research can provide a framework in which the passions and anger of the Bootle women can be expressed and in some way challenge and influence the current oppressive arborescent theories and practices of the Church of England.

> The theological task of the urban church is not about introducing God or a particular pattern of spirituality or belief into the city, but about discerning the drama of creation, incarnation and redemption as it unfolds in the 'everyday' faithfulness of the city. (Graham & Lowe, 2009, p. xx)

As academia and the Church theorise new paradigm shifts for mission and ministry into marginalised communities, I argue that there is a particular need to be attentive to what those communities are already saying. If the task of the urban church is to discern "the drama of creation, incarnation and redemption as it unfolds in the everyday faithfulness of the city" (Ibid), then there is a need to start at the seat of where the drama begins.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has scoped the 'other actors' on the stage. They are from across several disciplines reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of this thesis. Grace Jantzen's philosophical theology provides a 'new horizon' that enables me to see beyond the hopelessness of my urban experience towards a liberative practice of flourishing. I argue that there is a need to "read against the grain" (Graham 2009b, p. 3) of existing arborescent knowledge and theologies; that these arborescent theologies fail to consider the 'priority of the poor'; and exclude and marginalise the white working-class voice. Feminist practical theology provides me with the 'road metal' to make connections between Jantzen's philosophical theology and the importance of women's own experience as a valid site for generating new theological insights. The work of Sarah Pink (2012, 2015), Lefebvre (1991, 2014) and others then justify the ordinary and everyday as generative portals from where new knowledge, insights and meaning can be derived.

What this research project demonstrates is that within practical theology, there is a need for feminist and urban theology to engage in meaningful qualitative research into our urban communities. I argue that there is a critical need to let the marginal voices shape and define their own praxis. The majority of urban theology advocating for the underside of history although it is written from an 'academic armchair'. This research project therefore, intentionally prioritises the voices and experience of the white working-class women from Bootle and uses their *phronēsis* to shape and define a new praxis for urban church. It uses the tools of a feminist

qualitative research project to dig deep into the urban soil, to excavate norms and practices for the shaping of debates and conversations within the wider academy. It is writing public urban theology in women's voices, of women's knowledge.

What is attended to next in this thesis is a description of the methods and methodological approaches I use to construct this feminist qualitative research project.

Chapter 3. Intermission: A conversation on methodology

> The story teller does not tell the story so much as she/he is told by it. (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013, p. 4)

What I have argued so far in this thesis is that current arborescent urban theologies and practices of the Church of England have excluded the *phronēsis* of the white working-class women and have side-lined a 'priority for the poor' in favour of a 'priority for growth'. That the majority of urban theology and feminist theology is written *into* the lives of working-class women, rather than letting the working-class women define their own unique knowledge and gift to the academy.

This research project, therefore, intentionally prioritises the experiences of twelve white working-class women from Bootle as a generative site for a new feminist theological praxis for urban church. Within this chapter I explain the methods and methodological approaches I adopted in order to extract the *phronēsis* of the Bootle women. Feminist and narrative theories guide my methodological approach, and social science provides the methods for my qualitative based feminist research project. The resulting transcripts are analysed using Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analysis (TNA) and the raw data is defined within a thematic network (TN). The core principle metaphors derived from the text as a whole are expressed as three global themes: hope; placed and particular; and the death space. These three themes define the Gift of Leaven and are the unique and particular findings of this research project.

3. 1 A feminist research methodology

Feminist research is not simply research about women and women's lives; it is about a whole process that enables women to be the subjects, not the objects, of research. Slee (2004) advocates for a "participatory model" (p. 44) in which a feminist methodology does not simply dictate research "*about* women, but *by* and *for* women" (Ibid). The idea that research could be a participatory process is a relatively new development within social science, and most feminist researchers adopt "qualitative methods as the only ones capable of yielding such mutuality of participation" (Slee, 2004, p. 44).

In my research I was concerned with being able to create "an open yet supportive context" (Slee, 2004, p. 11) that would allow the women to talk freely about their life experiences and enable the research to be one of mutual discovery and exploration. I wanted the women to be centre stage in both the research and the analysis of data. I wanted their words and worlds to be the ones from which new knowledge would be generated and from which new theological insights would emerge.

Taking the "'first act' of theology [as the concrete lived experiences of the Bootle women] upon which the 'second act' of [theological] reflection is dependent" (Slee, 2004, p. 6) my research prioritises experience as the place where new knowledge is generated. My research is therefore subjective and open to many different levels of misrepresentation and researcher bias. I am minded that we bring our whole selves to the research process; "we listen with our lives" (Slee, 2013, p. 18). "Feminists insist that the beliefs and behaviours of the researcher are part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced in the research" (Slee, 2004, p. 51). In seeking to listen to the stories of the Bootle women I would also need to attend to my own story and hear myself into speech. The research process itself is a spiritual exercise for the researcher who will themselves be transformed by the process (Slee, 2013).

Reflexivity is a recognized method that can help to offset the power imbalance between researcher and subject and make the research process as transparent as possible (Fox, Martin & Green, 2007, p. 186; Slee, 2004, p. 51). "It is … a recognized part of qualitative methods to be reflexively concerned with the interaction between the site of study and the self as gendered, positioned, and traditioned subject" (Ward, 2012, p. 7). By interrogating the "position of the 'self' who observes" (Walton, 2014. p. xii) there is an explicit need for the researcher to write herself into the research and display a high level of reflexivity throughout the research process (Slee, 2004, p. 51). Slee (2004) suggests that what would enable reflexivity within the research is for the researcher to write in the first person and also to be honest about the challenges and problems that occurred within the research process. These problems should be offered as areas for further learning and reflection; as an honest and integral account of the whole research process.

The concept of 'Theology by Heart' has been developed by Graham, Walton and Ward (2005) as a process for engaging and transforming "heart-felt inner experiences into theological resources" (Ibid, p. 18). A significant piece of reflective writing that engaged my own 'theology of heart' was my *Reflection on Practice* (TH004: July 2014). In order to maintain this level of reflexivity throughout my research I have used both a personal journal and also a research journal. Bolton (2010) acknowledges that journals are the "corner stone of reflective practice and critical reflexivity [and can themselves be] a process of enquiry" (pp. 129-130). Extracts of my journal writing appear throughout this thesis forming an integral part of the research process itself.

Within my research I wanted to "hear into speech" (Morton, 1985) the stories of the white working-class women from Bootle. Clark-King (2003), Graham (2009a), Miller-McLemore (1993) and Morton (1985) all emphasise the need within the academy for the recovery of agency of hidden voices as imperative in developing a theology that not only hears but allows itself to be shaped by "new hitherto unheard voices" (Graham, 2009a, p. 227). There

is a notable absence of 'the poor' present within both academia and organized religion (Graham, 2009a, p. 147). "Theologians, both in Church and the academy, need to hear the voices of those who live out their faith day by day and especially the voices of those who do so far from the centres of theological power" (Clark-King, 2004, p. 5).

Skeggs, in *Formations of Class and Gender* (1997), prioritizes women's experience in her longitudinal ethnographic study of the lives of 83 white working-class women from the North West of England. It is a notable contributor to justifying the preferential place for women's research and the importance of the inclusion of the experiences of white working-class women (Skeggs, 1997, p. 1). The concept of class often being disregarded from theological writings assuming that "we are all middle-class" (Clark-King, 2004, p. 20). Skeggs was concerned with the need to understand from where academic knowledge and principles have been generated. She argues that "traditionally it was only bourgeois White men who were seen as legitimate knowers, producers and subjects" (Ibid, p. 18). Skeggs extends this criticism to feminist theory which she claims has also had a "tendency to reproduce traditional hierarchies of respectable knowledge" (Ibid, p. 20): "Thus the practices of working-class women have usually tended to be read through normalized knowledge which has been produced from the situated knower (male and female)" (Ibid, p. 20). Skeggs' research importantly legitimises the voices of white working-class women as a place of justifiable knowledge in their own right.

3.2 Narrative theory

> Individuals become autobiographical narratives by which they tell about their lives. These private constructions typically mesh with a community of stories, "deep structures" about the nature of life itself. (Riessman, 1993, p. 2)

Within social sciences and practical theology there has been a 'narrative turn' (Andrews *et al*, 2013, p. 1; Ganzevoort, 2014, pp. 214-215; Riessman, 2008, p. 14; Walton, 2014, p. 164). This is a turn away from realism and positivism to a place where "knowledge, discourse, and action are seen as social constructions, interpretations of the world and our selves" (Ganzevoort, 2014, p. 216). Narrative studies are multidisciplinary in nature and offer a research model that understands knowledge to be "constructed in the everyday world through an ordinary communicative act – storytelling" (Riessman, 2008, p. 14). In the context of this study the women's lives were "living human documents" (Ganzevoort, 2014, p. 221) from where meaning would be narrated and new knowledge and insights generated.

Elliott (2005), Ganzevoort (2014) and Bold (2012) all support the use of narrative as a way of providing rich and 'thick' insights into a subject area. There is a "recognition that stories are embedded in a social context [and that] narrative is central to human experience and existence" (Bold, 2012, p. 17). It is also an approach that allows for marginalised stories and voices to be heard aligning the narrative approach with liberation theology (Ganzevoort, 2011, p. 220).

"There is virtually no area within social research where narrative has not been discussed" (Elliott, 2005, p. 6). The popularity of narrative has led to what Riessman describes as a "narrative seduction" (2008, p. 5). The view that everyone has a story to feed media and culture, where "politicians even speak of the need for 'new narratives' to steer them through election periods" (Riessman, 2008, p. 5). However, there is no clear definition for narrative theory (Riessman, 2008) and also ambiguity about the methods and processes needed to elicit the story (Andrews *et al*, 2013, p. 1).

Within the school of practical theology, narrative theology has developed as a means of theological reflection (Graham, Walton and Ward, 2005, p. 47). Jesus' own life can be defined in parabolic form in which God's own

narrative is embodied within Jesus' "teaching/healing/storytelling" (Ibid, p. 51). It is the extension of this storytelling to our own lived experience which, when reflected in storied form becomes the place of divine revelation. This research project is drawing on the tools of both feminist and liberation theology in premising and prioritizing the experiences of white working-class women as a generative site from which God's own narrative is revealed. This is a form of constructive narrative in which "it is in the human capacity for storytelling itself, rather than in a pre-existing grand narrative, that redemptive power is located" (Walton, 2014, p. 165).

In adopting a narrative methodology I was guided in the process by 'a little blue book' by Catherine Riessman: *Narrative Analysis* (1993). Riessman's (1993, 2000, 2008) work developed out of her own practice: whilst researching the effects of divorce in the 1980s, instead of participants providing her with a neat list of reasons for divorce she was instead faced with a "long story" (Riessman, 2000, p. 1). There was a resistance from participants to "fragment their lived experience into thematic (code-able) categories" (Ibid). Similarly, Riessman's students were "metaphorically drowning in a sea of interview transcripts" (Riessman, 1993, p. v) and asking for a method, a process by which they could make sense of it all.

Riessman's work identifies the ways in which our own self impacts upon the research process and cites five levels of representation:

i) Attending to experience.
ii) Telling about experience.
iii) Transcribing experience.
iv) Analysing experience.
v) Reading experience.
(Riessman, 1993, p. 10)

Each level of the process is open to interpretation and misinterpretation essentially "investigators do not have direct access to another's experience"

(Ibid, p. 8). We construct reality – ours and other peoples – through a series of lenses (McCormick, 2000, p. 282), and we cannot do justice to a person's lived experience by simply processing the written text of their life into a series of codes; "narratives must be preserved, not fractured, by investigators" (Riessman, 1993, p. 4). The separation of people's words from the spoken and heard context has the danger of leading to a "crisis of representation" (Ibid, p. 283). In order to minimize this 'crisis of representation', I decided that, as much as possible, I would keep the transcripts whole. However, the practicalities of this within the confines of a thesis are prohibitive; "research is always a compromise between principles and pragmatics" (Slee, 2004, p. 46). It is in the theological reflections of Chapters 5 and 6 that I am able to cite significant extracts from the women's transcripts helping to witness effectively, at least in part, to the women as authors of their own worlds and words.

3.3 Methods

My main research method was that of semi-structured interviews where "researchers of social contexts usually choose to interview people when they are interested in their lives" (Bold, 2012, p. 96). Open ended, semi-structured interviews are established methods within qualitative research (Bold, 2012; Elliott, 2005; Kvale, 2007; Mason, 2002), for they allow "the interviewee greatest freedom to shape the unfolding narrative" (Cameron & Duce, 2013, p. 83). They are also the research method most likely to lead to the production of narrative data (Bold, 2012, p. 95). Feminist researchers favour interview methods, since they allow "subjects to speak of their experiences in their own words and thus have some measure of control over the research process and its content" (Slee, 2013, p. 44). In addition, many "feminists have championed and made significant contribution to the interview as a form of research rich in potential for exploring women's lives" (Slee, 2004, p. 11).

I used "theoretical sampling" (Mason, 2002, p. 124) as a process through which I selected the women to be interviewed. "When the goal of the research is to give voice, a specific group is chosen for study" (Ragin, 1994, p. 85). I carefully selected the women I chose to be interviewed, in order to ensure the sample was representative enough to answer my research question. For my "sampling strategy" (Mason, 2002, p. 123) there were four "sensitizing concepts" (Ragin, 1994, p. 87):

i. Geographical context: all the women lived in Bootle and within the bounds of the ecclesiastical parish of St John & St James.
ii. Experience of HMRI: I wanted to understand the impact of the HMRI, and I therefore purposefully chose women who had been 'rehoused' or directly affected by the HMRI.
iii. Age: I wanted a variable age range in order to elicit stories from different age perspectives. Under 18's were not selected, as I wanted to hear 'women's' voices.
iv. Christian belief: I wanted to interview women who would identify with a range of belief categories, from non-believers to fully active and committed members of the congregation.

For the purpose of this study I chose to interview twelve women. The number of those interviewed was governed by the size of thesis (50,000 words) and the desire to keep the research project manageable. All the women were white and working-class, reflecting the generalised social make-up of the area. At some point within the research process "the investigation reaches a point of saturation" (Ragin, 1994, p. 86), where there are no new revelations and the information being received becomes repetitive. By the time my final interview was completed, I felt that I was going over well-trodden ground.

Table 3.1 Research participants

Name	Date Interview	Age	Belief Category	Location
Carol	Jan 2015	52	Committed lay member of church community.	Lived on the edge of the HMRI area.
Marjorie	Feb 2015	90	Nominal believer. No regular church attendance.	Relocated as part of HMRI.
June C	Feb 2015	79	Nominal believer. No regular church attendance.	Relocated as part of HMRI.
June W	Feb 2015	76	Nominal believer. No regular church attendance.	Relocated as part of HMRI.
Irene	Feb 2015	70	Committed lay member of church congregation.	Relocated as part of HMRI.
Michelle	March 2015	22	Nominal believer. No regular church attendance.	Lived on edge of HMRI area.
Dawn	July 2015	45	Believer. Very occasional church attendance.	Lived on edge of HMRI area.
Janet	July 2015	44	Believer. Very occasional church attendance.	Lived on edge of HMRI area.
Johanna	August 2015	56	Committed lay member of church congregation.	Lived on edge of HMRI area.
Karen	August 2015	46	Believer. Very occasional church attendance.	Relocated as part of HMRI.
Ros	August 2015	48	Non-believer. No regular church attendance.	Lived on edge of HMRI area.
Debbie	Sept 2015	47	No expressed personal faith. Very infrequent church attender.	Lived on edge of HMRI area.

As part of my research proposal a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) was produced (see Appendix I: FHREC Application for Ethical Approval) and given to the research participants. I took time to explain in person the scope of my research and why I wanted to interview them. After my first contact, a

time and date were set for the interview. All the women I approached took part in the research project.

Where possible, I chose to interview the women in their own homes. This was, as Clark-King also states, to provide me with "greater insight into their lives, and partly because being on their territory seemed to off-set slightly the power relationship between interviewer and interviewee" (2003, p. 19). However, this was not always possible, particularly if others were living in the house; both Carol and Ros where interviewed in my sitting room.

Ruddick (2016) notes that conducting the actual interviews was often challenging, "distractions such as pets, family members or, in one case, the noise of torrential rain … interrupted many of the interviews, impacting the participants', and my own, concentration" (p. 28). I noted too the many distractions that were often present throughout the interview: the panting dog; the neighbour coming round for a cup of sugar; and in my interview with Debbie the television was on throughout. These were not ideal situations for a research interview. However, they were important observations of the reality of the women's lives. I did not see them so much as 'distractions' but as observations and interruptions that all formed part of the unfolding narrative and data.

A digital tape recording (Bold, 2012; Clark-King, 2003) was used to record the interviews and field notes were made during the interview to record visual observations. I used my research journal before and after each interview, this provided a rich source of data for my own reflexive process and a method for writing myself into the research (Bold, 2012; Elliott, 2005; Swinton & Mowat, 2006). I was mindful that everything was data: my own observations of the interview; the pauses and hesitations in the narrative; the laughing; and the setting of the interview scene.

The resulting recordings were then transcribed to form interview transcripts. I felt it was important that I transcribed the interviews myself, viewing the transcribing as an integral part of the data gathering and

analytical process. This was a time-consuming exercise but valuable in being able to hear the women speaking about their lives. At times I felt the women where living with me; I could hear their stories as I walked about the streets and went about my day-to-day life. I was pondering their stories, their lives and trying to make sense of it all.

> We read and re-read the transcripts, searching beneath the surface for what is going on. We look for signs, patterns, repetitions … We are like priests or preachers who break open the dense world of our subjects' lives and proclaim a liberating word that others can hear. (Slee, 2013, p. 21)

My research was as much a spiritual discipline as it was an academic exercise. I would pray before interviewing, before transcribing the texts and throughout the analysis of data. There was a sense that this was holy ground, a "holy writ" and I wanted to do justice to these "sacred texts" (Slee, 2013, pp. 17-24): "These stories are holy and manna for the soul, they are the treasures of darkness, the hidden whispers of God" (Research Journal, 5th August 2015). I was not a passive observer but was part of the research process itself, as Slee also confers, "we listen with our lives. We bring our whole selves to the act of listening" (Slee, 2013, p. 18). I found the 'best interviews' were the interviews I conducted when I was most open to myself, when I was also able to attend well and hear my own story.

All the women were given the option of making their stories anonymous, but all felt this was unnecessary: "My life's an open book … everybody knows everything anyway!" So, the names used are their actual names. I have, however, changed the names of third parties who could be identified, since they had not given their consent. Whilst all the women gave their consent for this research, I realise that some of the material is very sensitive, for example domestic abuse. I have taken care when using these particular examples within my research to ensure that no harm can be caused by a

disclosure, much of this information referred to is historic and already known within the public domain.

3.4 A pilot interview

> How will this work as a process/conversation – will I be able to hear Carol's story… will she be able to tell it? What new revelation will be made for us/the world in the telling? What small contribution to knowledge … in the telling of our stories something new is always revealed … our lives are made up of stories, stories are the meaning making of our lives. (Research Journal, 20th January 2015)

My first interview was with Carol. This was in part a pilot interview although the data has been included, since my research questions remained unchanged. Carol was 'well able to talk', and the interview process opened up into a rich narrative. I was mindful of the tension between allowing Carol to talk and trying to influence her story for the purpose of my research. There is always interviewer bias and influence in the research process, and I needed to be mindful of this. Carol's transcript generated 'thick' insights into 'life in the urban', and I felt that my interview framework worked well in being able to elicit the data necessary for this research project.

Considering Carol's interview, I clarified my research questions:

i. Tell me about how you came to live in Bootle?
ii. What about the regeneration scheme; how did that affect you?
iii. How did you see St John & St James Church?
iv. We are now building a new church; what are your thoughts about that?

These questions were prompts to aid the conversation and to ensure that the areas I wanted to research were covered by the interview. Mason (2002)

comments that "good qualitative interviewing is hard, creative, active work [and requires] a great deal of planning" (p. 67). She suggests that in the absence of a predesigned set of questions the interviewer has to think on their feet in ways that are "consistent with their research question" (Mason, 2002, p. 67). Mason alludes to the danger in interviews of creating nice pleasant social situations but with the end encounter having little bearing or relevance to the research question (Ibid). There was a need at all stages to "keep the notion of fitness for purpose at the forefront of [my] thinking" (Bold, 2012, p. 94). It was important for me that I viewed the research interviews as different from a pastoral visit. Before each interview I would consciously get into the mind-set of 'a researcher', thinking about my questions and what I hoped to discover.

3.5 Holding difficult stories

The majority of the interviews flowed providing a rich narrative but some of the interviews were difficult and awkward and painful to hold. The assumption is that stories will be healing and provide a happy ending. However, some stories offer no healing, and some stories are too difficult to tell.

> Went to listen to Karen's story, not sure what I was expecting. The interview took place in Karen's front room, it is one of the new houses built as part of the regeneration scheme, the front room is fairly sparse … the large deep window ledge is a shrine to Karen's family, it holds sacred memories for her… an ornament given to her by her daughter, who she hasn't seen for over twelve months and Wayne and Barry's funeral cards – precious memories within now an empty house, save for Scratch the dog. Karen's story was stilted, came out in dribs and drabs, no long conversation or rich narrative. Wondered at times whether Karen was asleep or on something, the orange Lucozade may be being alcohol. Karen was willing for me to

> interview her but it was as if she did not know how to tell her story. Maybe I didn't know how to ask?
>
> Karen's narrative needs to be centrally placed. It is not articulated or comprehensible, it did not really tell a story. It gave 'snap shots' into Karen's life, her daily life. Karen annoys me at times, always (well often) asking for money, today £5 for a taxi, last time £3 for some ciggies. But those are the fundamental things in Karen's life. She lives within the four walls of her house, life at the moment not offering very much, life in the past not so rosy either. We talk about 'transformation of life', 'hope' and 'restoration'. I wonder at Karen's life, when will healing come? But She comes in different guises and is already present with Karen but in a way I don't know, "you don't get to choose your visitation" (Walton, 2003, p. 209). Karen's voice needs to be heard, it's not a good story, there is no flow to it but there is no flow to Karen's life, her life is as it is. (Research Journal, 16th August 2015)

On the face of it Karen's interview was a complete failure. There was no long narrative or story being told. However, as I reflected upon 'Karen's story', her stilted account of her life, I was struck by how important it was to include her faltering narrative and that the whole of the research would have been less without Karen's contribution. Living in poor urban communities is not always easy or rosy and faces the Church with profound questions of human flourishing and life. Karen's story needs to be included in the whole, since it asks deep theological questions as to where God is in the broken and disregarded, in the fragmented, and in those who cannot speak for themselves.

Walton (2014) reflects on when "stories fail … for some people there may be no comfort to be found in storytelling … others have so lost a sense of their own identity that they cannot exercise the creative power necessary to become storytellers" (p. 167). Walton suggests that "theologians have

perhaps been too ready to use theodicy to bridge the gaps and the fissures in human experience in order to enable us to supply a happy ending to all our stories" (2014, p. 168). There is a place of tears that only silence can seem to fill, but there needs to be a way of holding this silence and attending to its pains.

> Can see so much potential in Karen's life. 'There by the grace of God' I often think, different circumstance, different life. We are the same age and her life is all 'pissed up!' Want to make it better for her, wave the magic wand. But there are no fairy godmothers today and even Jesus the Healer seems remote. (Research Journal, 17th September 2015)

Dawn's life was a string of tragic pearls. There was no way one could make her story have a happy ending; it was hard to hear and be present with.

> Listening to Dawn moved me, wanted to make things right, pay off the loan shark, give her some wallpaper and fill the cupboards with food. But this is Dawn's life and like the 'caged bird' [24] she must sing from where she is … and somehow God, church is where Dawn is at too and we need to make camp there. Resilience comes to mind, living out of the cracks of life and in the fragments gathered there is a blessing for all. Dawn's story, life enriches all our lives and makes us whole. In the New Jerusalem there will be no more tears … no more loan sharks ... no more debt. But we don't live in the New Jerusalem we are walking towards it and need to make music in the shit and to smell the rose. (Research Journal, 21st July 2015)

It was difficult and painful to hold Dawn's story, because to hear Dawn's story I needed to be attentive to my own wounds and brokenness. For the majority of life we frame our human condition around trying to fix things.

[24] From the poem Caged Bird by Maya Angelou (1983).

We try and "do for … we try to make relationships better, try to make the world better, try to be better people ourselves by doing things *for* people" (my emphasis; Wells, 2015, p.2). We listen to Dawn's story, not because we want to intervene or because there is a problem to be fixed but simply because God is present in these encounters. God is "with us" (Matthew 1:23 [New Revised Standard Version]), in the relationships, in the stories.

In the 'being with' of Dawn's story I had to acknowledge those things within my own life's story that could not be easily fixed or storied with a happy ending. It is the holding of what I have come to term as 'the death space' (see Fig. 4.4), the space where hope has died, and everything is finished. It is the death space that the women attend to with their oils and spices at the end of Luke's Gospel (23:56). They went to be attentive to death, to hold the space and the silence but with an attending borne out of their own wounds and loss. Within our scripted churches there is little space for holding 'the death space' but it is this death space that I argue is the "seed ground for the rebirth of hope" (Grey, 2000, p. 97). It is these 'failed stories' that become this seedbed for hope within the Church. Resurrection only comes after a holding of the Easter Saturday and attending to the death space. Dawn's story and Karen's 'unspoken' story, their place of tears, needs to be held within the loving relationship of the community of faith, who themselves become witnesses to the death, the life and the resurrection.

The other problem that I was faced with during my interviews was that of what happens when one hears a story that one does not want to hear. Debbie's interview had been difficult throughout. The television was on, and a neighbour was also present. At the end of the interview, the television was turned back to full volume. The news was on, and the issue of migrants and refugees was being reported. Debbie expressed a real sense of anger and injustice:

> They'll all come over here and get those new houses it's disgusting … we've been evicted and trying to keep our heads above water to feed

> the kids whilst our benefits are getting cut. They just come over here and get our houses … (Research Journal, 3rd September 2015)

Where do I place this narrative? I am left more with a question than an answer. I know it is important that it is included; maybe it just needs to be said, voiced. It is part of the hearing into speech.

Denise Ackermann writes about the challenges caused in South African Christian communities following on from the discourses that were revealed in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (1998). In seeking a hermeneutics of healing Ackermann acknowledges two important aspects of her feministic research praxis that have a direct bearing on this research project. Firstly, Ackermann acknowledges the importance of listening to each other's stories. Ackermann is a white educated woman. She needed to be attentive to the black women and men who had suffered through the apartheid regime; she needed to converse with women whose views and contexts were different from her own (Ackermann, 1998, p. 86). I am an educated middle-class woman who has not borne children, so my context is considerably different from that of the women I have chosen to interview. There are important ethical concerns that need to be considered when listening to, and speaking on behalf of, the Other, and these will be addressed in the next section of my methodology. However, I also know that it is important that these voices are heard, since by not listening to the Other the danger is that these voices would never be heard at all.

Secondly, Ackermann (1998) focuses on the important place that lament has in the community of faith. She bemoans the fact that within Western Christianity we have lost our ability to lament. For Ackermann, lament is from the human soul; it is expressed communally but "comes from individual hearts which are weeping and raging, seeking a response from God" (1998, p. 96).

Within our faith communities there needs to be a space for lament, for tears, for the questioning of God. For the holding of stories that Dawn, Karen and Debbie present to us and for the hearing of stories that are different from our own. Because their stories are difficult to hear, we are tempted to try and 'fix things', to pay off the debts and wallpaper the hall; yet these fixes would only be temporary. The challenge from our Christian tradition is that we want all stories to be redemptive and that we too quickly look for theological fixes based on a linear reading of life, death and resurrection. However, when the stories cannot be fixed and there are 'no fairy godmothers', there simply needs to be an acknowledgment and a holding of the space. As a faith community we are called together with the women from Luke's Gospel to a holy waiting. We are called to hold the space that only tears and anger can fill and trust that in the holding of the story we can also find ways of healing and life.

3.6 Ethical concerns

> Ethics permeates all aspects of the research, from initial ideas to the final reporting and wider dissemination. (Bold, 2012, p. 61)

I remember a quote from Susan Thistlethwaite: "How do I come to know the otherness of other people in a way that neither collapses their subjectivity into mine nor makes them into an exotic other?" (1994, p. 6). This had stuck with me from an early stage of the research design. Who was 'I' to go into and study the lives and experiences of 'other' women and make them into 'an exotic other'? What right did I have to excavate their stories and bring them from the private to the public domain?

Bold (2012), Elliott (2005), O'Leary (2004), Silverman (2011) and Ward (2012) all acknowledge that the main concern in relation to ethics within research is the power held by the researcher and the consequent risk of abuse of power or harm to participants. Careful consideration needs to be

given to ethics at every stage of the research process and particularly to the implications that the research may have on the lives of those being researched (Bold, 2012, pp. 47-70; Bulmer, 2001, pp. 46-57).

Gaining informed consent is an important aspect of ensuring that the subject enters into the interview process willingly (Bold, 2012; Silverman, 2011). All research data would be stored in a locked cabinet; electronic data would be password protected. These are the nuts and bolts of good ethical research and are addressed to in my submission to the Ethics Committee of the University of Chester (see letter of approval: Appendix II). However, there are more subtle areas of ethics that also need to be considered: researcher bias; the issue of "representing Others" (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996, p. 2); and the dilemmas in making private lives public.

I am mindful that I write as a white middle-class woman who has been educated to master's level and is currently studying for a doctorate. I am also not a mother. This latter was not one of my sampling criteria, but significantly all of the women that I interviewed were mothers. I am therefore 'different' from the women that I have chosen for this study. Although I am an 'insider', I am also an 'outsider'. I walk the same streets as the women in my research; shop at the same shops; attend the same doctor's surgery. I am equal in many ways to the women that I am researching. Yet, I have money and education, which means I am not 'stuck' here in Bootle; I am mobile, and at some stage will move on. So, my experiences are different to the women whom I have chosen to interview.

This issue of 'representing Others' is not new to social science and is a key area for consideration in contemporary feminist theory and practice. In 1996 Wilkinson and Kitzinger collated a series of essays from a wide tradition of feminist writers in order to explore the "dimensions of Otherness" (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996, p. 1): "Whether and how, we should represent members of groups to which we do not ourselves belong – in particular, members of groups oppressed in ways we are not" (Ibid).

Differences of race; ethnicity; (dis)ability; age; class; sexuality; the seduction of sameness; and motherhood status were all identified as possible dimensions of Otherness. There was no one consensus on how Otherness should be approached by feminist researchers. Bell hooks view was simply that of 'stop', seeing any form of representation as colonisation and thus arguing that we should speak only for ourselves (Ibid, p. 11).

"Celebrating Otherness" is another approach evident within the feminist tradition (Ibid, p. 12). Here the cultural experiences and practices of Others are celebrated in place of the dominant tradition. However, the problem with this approach is that it can lead to over-romanticizing of the Other. There is no one easily defined approach as to how to construct a good representation of the Other that does not diminish either the agency of the researcher or the agency of the subject of the research. Slee develops an understanding of 'difference' within the research process suggesting that "no matter how much like another human being one person may be, there is always difference present and usually along a multiplicity of axes" (2004, p. 47). O'Leary (2004) also acknowledges that it is simply not possible to be a "super researcher" unaffected by history, power and all aspects of socialization (p. 43). We bring our own bias, set of privileges and ideological assumptions to the research process, and in order to conduct good ethical research it is important we acknowledge the power and bias that we bring.

The intention of this research is to bring into the academy and public domain the voices and narrated experiences of the women from Bootle. In doing so I am, as Edwards and Ribbens suggest, "extending the dominance of publicly based knowledge and expertise and including its intrusion into every nook and cranny of social life" (1998, p. 13). There are ethics that need to be considered in research when private lives are made public. Traditionally there has been a divide between what is public and what is private:

> [There has been] a dualism embedded in our discourse of public and

> private: the public realm of business, finance and economics was associated with maleness, whilst the female sphere was that of the domestic, the private world of the home and family, the Victorian 'angel in the home'. (Berry, 2013, p. 30)

Feminist research has to some extent blurred this dichotomy between the public and the private by bringing into the public arena issues that had previously not been disclosed. Areas of 'private life' – for example divorce, sexual violence and motherhood – have all become subjects for feminist research. I needed to be aware within my own research of the implications of making the 'private' stories of the women 'public'.

The ethical question that then needs to be asked is "whose voice is being heard?" (Bold, 2012, p. 61). If I am advocating the hearing into speech of the voices of the women from Bootle, then I need to be careful that it is not just my own story that I am embellishing in and through the lives and experiences of the women. This is a concern upon which Standing (1998) elaborates in her reflections on the dilemmas faced by feminist researchers in "writing the voices of the less powerful" (p. 200). Standing suggests that even to research and write about working-class women leads to a risk of "sustaining hierarchies of knowledge" (1998, p. 11). There are, she concludes, "no easy answers [but] to research only those who are like us … would result in the silencing of the voices of many less powerful groups" (Ibid, p. 200).

Bold suggests that "ethically a reflexive, dialogic approach to co-construct meaning is sounder than distanced analysis from outside the situation" (2012, p. 60). The five levels of representation (Riessman, 1993, p. 10), noted at the start of this chapter, are a really helpful guide in being able to identify the different stages of the research process that are affected by researcher bias, misrepresentation and the abuse of power. At all these stages there is a need for myself as researcher to be critically reflexive and ethically aware. Reflexivity will, to some degree, offset some of the power imbalance and the 'difference' between myself as researcher and the Other,

the women subjects of my research (Bold, 2012; O'Leary, 2004, pp. 42-55). I cannot change my spots, but I can be mindful of them and hold them at the forefront at all stages of the research process. Bulmer concludes that, "there are no cut-and-dried answers to many ethical issues which face the social researcher … the best counsel … is to be constantly ethically aware" (2001, p. 56).

I am deeply grateful to all the women for making themselves available for my research project. I may have come to them with a heap of qualifications, but they were the ones who taught me. They were the educators; they were generating new knowledge, knowledge that both the Church and the academy needed to hear. I could offset Thistlethwaite's concerns by the simple fact that if I did not hear their voices then these voices would be absent. Clark-King draws the same conclusion:

> [That] not speaking for the Other can be the safe option, preserving the researcher from all charges of misrepresentation … However, … this option feels like an opting out, which only serves to extend the silence. (Clark-King, 2003, p.23)

3.7 Data analysis

> In order to generate findings that transform raw data into new knowledge, a qualitative researcher must engage in active and demanding analytical processes throughout all phases of the research. (Thorne, 2000, p. 68)

As I began the process of analysis I was mindful of the multiple lenses through which I would be interpreting the data. Even before an interviewee speaks there is a beginning of representation occurring, for by entering into the women's home and their social and cultural context I have already begun to analyse the 'data' of their lives. I am interpreting their spoken word, hearing their conversation and guiding what is told. I am focusing

questions on what I deem to be important or significant for my research question. As their words are then subsequently transcribed into text, I am making decisions about what should be included or omitted, what pause or 'er' should be written into the transcripts. As Riessman suggests, "different transcription conventions lead to and support different interpretations … they ultimately create different worlds" (1993, p. 13). The difficulty for me, as Riessman also notes, is to "find ways of working with texts so the original narrator is not effaced, so she does not lose control over her words" (1993, p. 34).

The challenge of qualitative and in particular feminist research is that it relies on inductive reasoning and has a high worth attached to experience (Maynard, 2004, p. 135; Thorne, 2000, p. 69). This can lead to particular challenges when seeking to analyse the texts. Some theorists go down the route of textual or linguistic analysis (Kvale, 2007, p. 110; McCormick, 2000, p. 286). Others follow Labov's theme of story construction and emplotment, often cited as a "structural model of narrative" (Elliott, 2005, p. 42), and a variety of methods in between. All theorists approach narrative analysis from a slightly different perspective (Andrews *et al*, 2013; Elliott, 2005, pp. 36-59; Leavy, 2007, pp. 223-248; Riessman, 2008; Silverman, 2011, pp. 75-86; Slee, 2004, pp. 57-59; Theron, 2015; Thorne, 2000, pp. 69-70). There is no one definitive method for the analysis of narrative data (Riessman, 1993, pp. 18-19), no one clear method for the researcher to adopt in her attempts to elicit and reveal the 'hidden meaning' in the texts (Bold, 2012, p. 121; Elliott, 2005, p. 36).

It may appear from the structure of this thesis that the analysis of data followed a linear pattern. However, the reality of my data analysis and the processing of my research results was much messier and "more one of trial and error than a systematic application of principles" (Slee, 2004, p. 60). There were several stages involved in the sifting and analysis of my data which spanned an eighteen-month period; both Slee (2004) and Birch

(1998) also acknowledge the multiplicity of stages involved in analysing narrative data.

My method was one of a "free flowing dialogue characterised by a constant backwards and forwards movement between data" (Slee, 2004, p. 57), my own presuppositions, and voices from the academy. Slee suggests this is a potentially daunting part of the research process, akin to the "dark night of the soul or the wilderness of unknowing" (2013, p. 21) and there were certainly periods of "open minded confusion" (Cloke & Pears, 2016a, p. 10). However, despite the challenges of this stage of the research process I also found it to be creative and dynamic as I began to enflesh the women's voices and distil their particular wisdom. Birch (1998) describes this stage as "being here", where the raw data from the research is transformed through analysis and the writing of the thesis (p. 178).

Within this research project I was now faced with the task of 'being here' and creating meaning and theme from 100 000 words of text. Bold (2012) identifies "thematic analysis" (p. 129) as one method that can be applied to analysing narratives. "Thematic experience analysis encompasses two ideas: that the researcher is often seeking and identifying themes (or not) within the narratives; and that experiences usually involve relationships between people and contexts" (Ibid). The concept of thematic analysis sits well with my ontological perspective that social reality is constructed by the interactions between people and their contexts. It allows for flexibility and is a "useful tool to identify and organise key themes from qualitative data" (Bischof, Warnaar, Barajas & Dhaliwal, 2011, p. 19). The aim of my analysis of data was, as Slee also claims in her methods for data analysis, "to elicit and reveal, as far as possible, the meaning for the subjects of their experience … so that the underlying meanings implicit in the women's accounts can be brought to light and articulated" (2004, p. 57).

> It is Spring 2016 and I find myself on a six-day study week from Bootle. I am in the middle of the Lake District in a beautiful little idle

> just outside Hawkshead. It is the Diocesan retreat house and it seems miles away from the urban smell but I have brought the stories with me. Here the landscape speaks prophetic and sure. Life grows out of the land, it is seen most profusely at this time of year. There are new lambs everywhere. There is something new and fresh being born out of the ancient topography. I think that too of Bootle, there is something new being born there. It is born out of a deep sense of place and identity which is marked out of the landscape itself where life has been written and enacted and held. (Research Journal, 21st April 2016)

Having identified thematic analysis as my method, the first stage of my analysis of data was to complete a basic coding of the transcripts. I literally wrote into the margins of each transcript basic themes that emerged out of the dense text of the women's stories. Themes of memory; sickness; poverty; identity; belonging, to name but a few. This first stage of analysis involved an "extensive and detailed reading and rereading of the transcripts" (Slee, 2004, p. 58). My research journal was an invaluable tool and a "process of enquiry itself" (Bolton, 2010, p. 130). It was in my research journal that I captured themes and made important observations which would help to enflesh my argument.

I chose at this stage of the process to rewrite the transcripts in order to align them with the basic themes; an extract of a worked example can be seen in Appendix III. To assist my process of analysis I followed the methods outlined by Attride-Stirling's (2001) thematic network analysis (TNA), whose first stage of data analysis was also that of identifying basic themes.

Attride-Stirling's (2001) TNA provides a "robust and highly sensitive tool for the systematization and presentation of qualitative analyses" (p. 385). This "step-by-step guide of the analytical process [suggests that] thematic analysis can be usefully aided by and presented as thematic networks … web-like illustrations that summarize the main themes constituting a piece

of text" (Ibid). It is based on the argumentation theory of Toulmin (2003) and aims to provide a logical framework for interpreting the implicit meaning behind the explicit statements within people's discourses. As a process of textual analysis Attride-Stirling categorises a three-tiered thematic network (TN) that systematizes the extraction of:

> i. Lowest-order premises evident in the text (Basic Themes).
> ii. Categories of basic themes grouped together to summarize more abstract principles (Organizing Themes).
> iii. Super-ordinate themes encapsulating the principal metaphors in the text as a whole (Global Themes).
>
> (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 388)

Having identified the basic themes from the transcripts, I began to identify more general organizing themes from across the different narratives. These organizing themes were the important threads that linked together the women's narratives. "Theorizing across a number of cases by identifying common thematic elements … is an established tradition with a long history in qualitative enquiry" (Riessman, 2008, p. 74). Again, the use of my research journal formed an integral part of this process. However, as Birch also recognises, "from the transcriptions I found I was reading a definitive whole, but if I started cutting and splicing, linking and indexing, I felt that the nature of the story and social setting disappeared" (1998, p. 179). In order to address this, I wanted to start with a story. Going back again to the transcripts Dawn's story stood out as a place to begin.

> There is an unspoken Christian narrative woven into Dawn's story … It is a deep embodied theology that comes out of the urban experience and life. It speaks of loss, brokenness and abandonment, and then resilience, hope and new life. (Research Journal, 21st April 2016)

So I chose the story of the 'dinosaur lamp' to start this second stage of my analysis of data. As I was hearing the women into speech I was aware how their lives were narrated around ordinary objects of the everyday. This next stage of my analysis is therefore structured around ten 'objects of the ordinary' which have been taken directly from the women's own stories. Aligning my analysis of data with my theoretical perspectives, that ordinary and everyday objects can become sites for revelation enabling new meanings to be constructed (de Certeau, 1988; Miller-McLemore, 2014; Pink, 2012; Walton, 2014). My analysis of data continued in a "free flowing dialogue" (Slee, 2004, p. 57) between the women's texts and voices from the academy. Following Graham's interpretive model for transforming practice (1996, p. 7), these texts become the 'first act' in being able to define a new theological praxis for urban church (Slee, 2004, p. 6).

Having completed the first reflective turn around the 'objects of the ordinary', I then went back to the women's texts and completed Attride-Stirling's (2001) TNA. I wanted to ensure that the organizing themes I had identified were a true representation of the women's own transcripts. The practical completion of the TNA involved writing all 250 basic themes onto post-it-notes; these were then grouped around organizing themes. There were nineteen organizing themes in total that were generated from my research data. See worked example of 'sacred space' as an organizing theme (Fig. 3.1). The basic themes clustered around sacred space are from the women's transcripts. The organizing themes are therefore generative in that they arise out of and from the women's own stories.

Fig. 3.1 Sacred space as an organizing theme

The final stage of a TNA is to collate the organizing themes into definitive global themes, it is these global themes that then define the thematic network (TN). The global themes are the claim of the network, "the core principle metaphor that encapsulates the main point of the text" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 393). There are three global themes generated from the raw data of this research project: hope; placed and particular; and the death space. From the worked example above the organizing theme of sacred space is aligned to the global theme of hope. These three global themes are described as the Gift of Leaven and are presented in this research project as a TN (see Fig. 4.1).

It is through the production of this TN that we begin to generate a different level of meaning from the text and helpfully find a way of organizing the 100 000 words of transcript into some form of meaning making structure. In essence, as Mason explains, the methods of data analysis help to "organize and 'get a handle' on your data. The remainder of your analytical effort will go into constructing explanations and arguments in relation to your intellectual puzzle" (2002, p. 171). Having identified the TN, I then

completed the final stage of my data analysis. This appears in my thesis as six 'theological fragments'. This forms the second reflective turn (see Fig. 4.5), and it is in these fragments that new meanings begin to be constructed and my argument is enfleshed. As I completed this stage of the research process, I was minded that I could have continued with more theological fragments; however, limitations dictated by the length of thesis prevailed.

3.8 Summary

My research quest is to extract the hidden *phronēsis* from the storied lives of twelve white working-class women. In order to do this, I have adopted Graham's interpretive model for transforming practice (1996) and Forrester's correlation approach to practical theology (2005). Both these approaches encourage the understanding that new knowledge can be found through stories and experience.

In this chapter I have outlined my methodological approaches, the source norms for which are feminist and narrative. My research methods are that of semi-structured interviews, in order to extract thick, deep and rich stories from the urban scene. To address the "crisis of representation" (Riessman, 1993, p. 283), I have explored the importance of reflexivity and the need to be aware of the '"self' who observes" (Walton, 2014, p. xii). Ethical concerns are also critical to this and are considered at all stages of the research process. I discover that not all stories have a happy ending and that not everybody is able to tell their story. However, the inclusion of these 'difficult stories' within my research findings is critical to the whole.

There are several stages to my process of data analysis and also a movement between each of the stages; the process is by no means linear. Inductive reasoning from which basic and organizing themes are identified is complemented and enhanced by the rigours of a TNA. The TN is my main research finding and is described as the Gift of Leaven, defined by the three

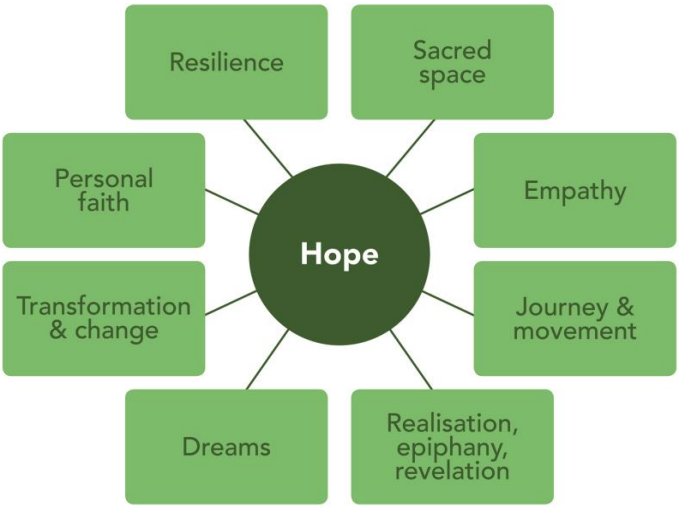
global themes of: hope; placed and particular; and the death space (see Fig. 4.1). The TN is then the basis for a sustained period of theological reflection incorporating 'objects of the ordinary' and six 'theological fragments'.

This thesis is essentially a play of two halves. The first half explains the context; the other actors on the stage and methods used. The second half is The Main Performance. It is here that the results and analysis of my research project are staged and presented. The next chapter describes the Gift of Leaven, which is the TN that has been generated by my research. The TN distils the *phronēsis* of the Bootle women, which is then brought into a process of theological reflection through 'objects of the ordinary' and by generating 'theological fragments' (Chapters 5 & 6). It is within these two chapters that the strands of a new feminist theological praxis for urban church are defined.

Chapter 4. The Main performance Act I: The Gift of Leaven

> So back to the quarry, to obtain the fragments that give us road metal, that provoke the oyster to make pearls, that concentrate the light into visions, that generate utopias, that build up jigsaws of meaning, and that nourish the activity of truthfulness, love and justice which is the practice of the Reign of God! (Forrester, 2005, p. 21)

My argument throughout this thesis is that the current arborescent theologies and practices of the Church of England have excluded the *phronēsis* of the Bootle women and do little to foster life within the urban context. I have argued that knowledge is generated from somewhere, and this has tended to be white bourgeois men and women (Skeggs, 1997) to the exclusion of marginalised voices. The recovery of these voices, and in particular the voice of white working-class women, is both critical and paramount if our practices for urban church are to be truly liberative. The majority of current urban theology tending to speak from the academy instead of letting the marginal voices shape and define the praxis. To address these issues, I have engaged the tools of a feminist qualitative research methodology to extract the hidden *phronēsis* of twelve white working-class women from Bootle. It is their *phronēsis*, their Gift of Leaven, that is the principle and core finding of my research quest, defined in this thesis as a thematic network (see Fig. 4.1).



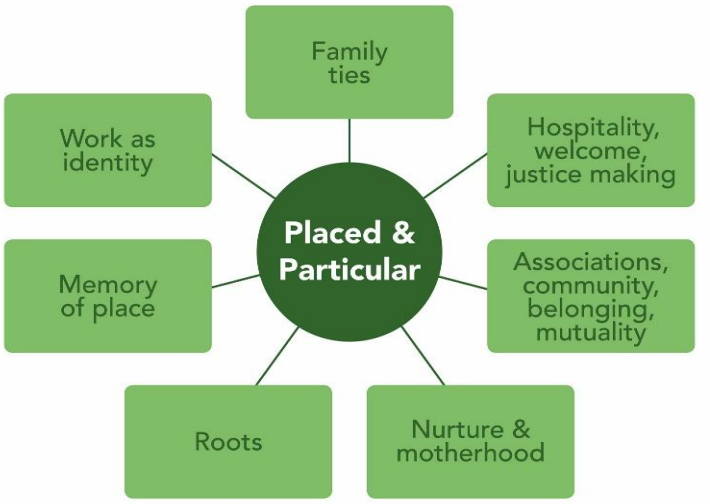


Fig. 4.1 The Gift of Leaven as defined by a thematic network © Claire Dawson 2017

> Within the urban there is an openness and vulnerability, nowhere to hide. Here the rawness of life is exposed but here also are found moments of transcendence and grace … we don't realise that church is already present within the community. Pealing back the layers reveals Christ(a) already there, crucified, wounded, abandoned; yet rising. (Research Journal, 21st April 2016)

Within the data analysis stage of this research project, I resisted for some time, the completion of the TNA. I did not want to edit down the women's stories to a series of codes or categories. However, having half completed the TNA by identifying basic and organizing themes, I felt that completing the process would aid and enhance my analysis of data (Attride-Stirling, 2001). On final completion of the TN, I remember just sitting and looking at what had been created. I prayerfully held the TN and all the stories it contained. In reflecting on the TN, I could see the value of presenting my research results as this interrelated web-like illustration (see Fig. 4.1).

The TN has been generated systematically and methodically from the raw data of this research project; it is the particular *phronēsis* and the Gift of Leaven of the Bootle women. The three global themes: hope; placed and particular; and the death space have been taken directly from the coded transcripts of the women and are therefore unique to this research. The TN tells us what the text as a whole is about within the field of reference of this study, it generates the new knowledge of this research quest.

The interrelated web-like structure of the TN importantly reflects something of the interconnectivity of the women's lives with each other and their relationship to the divine. Their lives are deeply placed and particular, the women's lived experience being narrated out of a sense of place and being embodied in and through a myriad of assemblages and associations (Latour, 2005). The death space attends to the terrors and awfulness of life but this place of tears is importantly held within the community of relationships, placed and particular, and is also marked by the global theme

of hope. There is a mutual dependency between the three global themes which are held in relationship to each other: "There is brokenness, a sense of loss and death and abandonment … But then, there is a sense of hope and presence fashioned out of all that is lost" (Research Journal, 21st April 2016).

My thesis builds on the argument that the *phronēsis* of the Bootle women, the TN, reflects something of the whole truth: "[It] catch[es] the light [and] generate[s] a vision that many can share – glimpses into another world" (Forrester, 2005, p. 20). This 'truth' I argue is of more lasting hope and worth than the arborescent theologies and practices of Church and academy which have tended to factor out the *phronēsis* of the white working-class women. The Gift of Leaven is the new knowledge which has emerged rhizomatically from this research project, it has been found in the "cracks and crevices [of life away from] the purview of institutional church and theology" (Baker, 2013, p. 4). This leaven is "the cup of blessing" (1 Corinthians 10:16a [New Revised Standard Version]) and has been gifted to us by the women from Bootle, "a place from which no one expects good to come" (Morisy, 2004, p. 82).

However, the TN is removed from the "story and social setting" (Birch, 1998, p. 179), so it is important that it is viewed as part of the data analysis and not a full completion of the process. Nevertheless, I feel the TN is a valuable part of this thesis, for it specifically identifies the nature of the of *phronēsis* the Bootle women and their particular gift of knowledge to the academy. The remainder of this chapter explores in more depth the three global themes: hope; placed and particular; and the death space.

4.1 Hope

Fig.4.2 Hope as a global theme

In a place where I was struggling to find signs of life, I found that the theological concept of **hope** was woven into and embedded within the women's stories. The urban is often viewed as a place of little aspiration where people have no dreams. Yet the women's narratives were 'hope-filled' and told stories of **dreams** and ambitions, this was evident in Carol's dreams and wondering of the New St John & St James and Ros' pride in her brother who had "done really well for himself and life" (Ros).

Hope was storied through **journey and movement,** an exodus and a return. The women embodied a sense of movement and journey, which was narrated out of their particular stories. There was **transformation and change;** as the women's stories were told their lives were evolving and transforming: "… it was time for me to take control back … I didn't want to have emotional baggage … I had to be a new person" (Johanna).

The women's stories were marked by 'interruptions', which generated moments of **realisation**, **revelation** and **epiphany**. In Johanna's story it

was the '999 call' to the Police, which interrupted the cycle of abuse. In Dawn's narrative there was a moment of realisation and healing for Marc as his balloon disappeared, which marked a change in his behaviour as he returns to school. For Janet there was an epiphany when she claimed her life back from drug abuse: "Urm and then this time I just know it was time for me to grow up and be a mum to me kids and try and get some sort of life" (Janet).

There was a strong expression of hope arising out of the women's own personal faith stories. Irene's promise to God, "that you'll [God will] always come first" (Irene) and Michelle's testimony that her children were a gift from God. The church building was understood as a sanctuary and **sacred space** and gave an invitation to a relationship with others and God. All of the women connected to the church through a rite of passage, but the church building was also a significant place of meeting within the community and a place to belong. The church's own physical presence mediated hope and was symbolic of God's own presence in the community: "It's always been there right through childhood, so it's just always been a part of me" (Janet).

Hope was reflected most profoundly, in the women's sheer **resilience** to life's challenges. A capacity to make something out of nothing and to hold on to the thinnest of threads: "Just get on with it … no point sitting down and crying and dwelling over it … it's not going away until you get on your feet and do something to change out your head" (Debbie). There was a deep sense of **empathy** born out of an honest rawness to life's difficulties, from which compassion for others was generated and gifted. This was expressed as Johanna narrated how she could help others because of her own experience of domestic abuse: "Then you realise it wasn't your fault and you can move on … you can overcome it and become a stronger person which might enable you to help others and be more of a positive role for your children" (Johanna).

4.2 Placed and particular

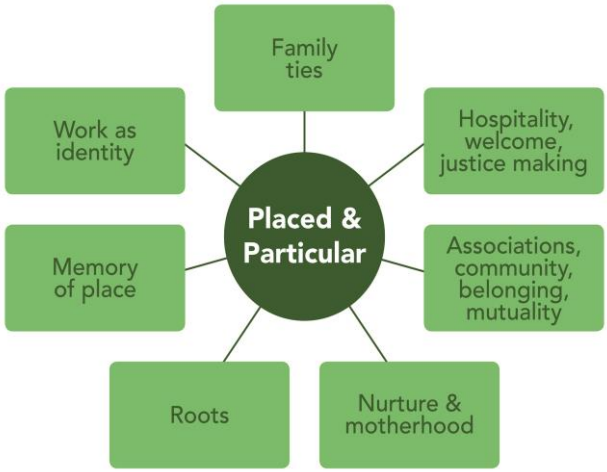


Fig. 4.3 Placed and particular as a global theme

The global theme of **placed and particular** relates to the myriad of interconnected relationships, assemblages and associations, material and non-material that go into defining the women's sense of identity and personhood. 'Place' relates to the physical environment, the bricks and the mortar and 'particular' reflects the nature of human relatedness itself.

The stories of the women spoke clearly of a sense of **community and belonging** and the many **associations** that went into making the social. There was a deep sense of having **roots**: "I was born in Humphrey Street, 1933" (Marjorie); "Lived here all me life" (Ros); "I was born in Bootle, then brought up in Bootle, moved away and then came back to Bootle … then just stayed here ever since; it's home" (Johanna). The physical environment shaped and defined the women's identify through a **memory of place**; narrated through street names and the physical geography of land and buildings:

> It was a community that stuck together. We used to have a thing called 'the Triangle'. Cause if you look where your church is and my

> road is, comes to a triangle and everyone who lived on that Triangle used to put money into a little savings … and we'd have coach trips. (Ros)

Stories were narrated through the built environment, even though many of the physical landmarks were now demolished. The stories were held in a collective memory of place: the schools; the streets; the factories; and the churches once present within the community, still held memories of life and identity for the women, even though these places were no longer physically present.

The women's sense of **identity** and personhood was shaped and found through **work**, **nurture and motherhood; family ties** were also particularly significant. All of the women had born children, and children were the meaning for their lives. As the women's stories were narrated, it was evident there were deep relationships and connections webbed across the community. The women embodied a sense of caring beyond their own immediate family to the wider community. A spirit of **welcome and hospitality** was engendered through the 'open door' of the women's lives. This was expressed in Ros' door always being open and in Debbie's generous hospitality: "But nine times out of ten you walk past my house, doors wide open and that is a freedom to walk in and out my house" (Ros); "There's an old woman Sheila on Monfa Road … and [Debbie] does her roast every Sunday and she'll go and make endless cups of teas … if she didn't have Debbie who would she have?" (Janet).

4.3 The death space

The death space is an important and significant finding of this research project. It is the third global theme defined through the TN and holds particular gifts that the Bootle women bring to the academy and the Church, gifts that are often scripted out of our faith stories. The death space reflects

both the tragic within the women's own narratives and the tragic within the wider community. It is important that the death space is understood and held within the other two global themes of hope and placed and particular. Without hope and loving relationships the death space would unravel life leading to destruction and annihilation. However, by being carefully held within the core global themes of hope and the myriad of loving relationships, there is space for this place of tears to be attended to as the full awfulness of life's terrors are named and given voice.

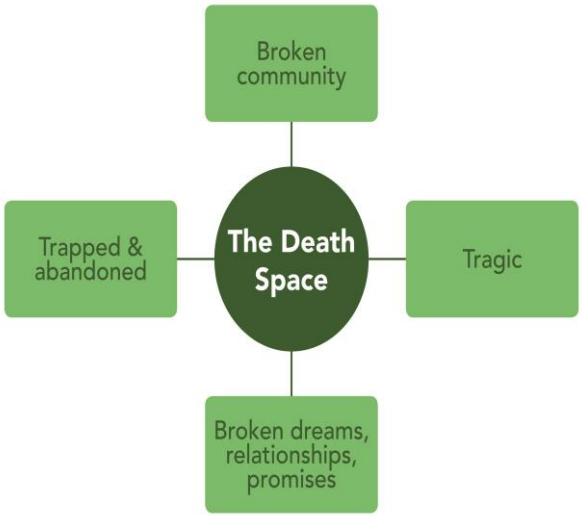


Fig. 4.4 The death space as a global theme

The death space was defined by brokenness, marked by **broken dreams, broken relationships and broken promises**. The dreams of life were thwarted, and ambitions quashed. This was narrated by Carol as she expressed her broken dreams of becoming a nurse: "I had wanted to be a nurse for quite a while, that was the plan … I could have found another route to nursing, but I suppose I never did … I just got into the secretarial thing" (Carol). Many of the women spoke of broken relationships. This was evident as Johanna spoke of her broken marriages and Karen as she talked about the pain of being separated from her daughter: "Just want to see Sarah … police told me not to phone her [it's been] over a year" (Karen).

The sense of brokenness within the community, of half torn down buildings and boarded-up properties; seemed also to be mirrored in the awfulness and **tragedy** of the women's own lives. All of the women's stories were marked by loss; illness; addiction; death; poverty; and abuse that seemed to hold a repeating pattern: "When I found Andy dead … then me mum died two months later, then me dad died two months later … I had a breakdown and me kids got took into care … they have all died again, now [life has] crumbled again" (Karen).

The women expressed feelings of utter **abandonment** and of being completely **trapped**. Their lives reaching 'rock bottom' where pain and awfulness was felt and experienced. This was heard within Dawn's story as she talked about contemplating suicide and writing a note to her mum; and Karen's story as she spoke of struggling to cope with the harshness of life in prison**:** "[Prison was] horrible … cause they gave you nothing to withdraw off heroin, people were killing themselves with withdrawal" (Karen).

The death space attended to the pain of the **broken community** caused by the HMRI: the physical tearing down of buildings and homes; a breaking up of community; and a sense of anger at the injustice of the whole scheme of things. The following quotes from the women's transcripts expressed this brokenness: "I'd say there's no community now like there used to be" (June W); "They haven't just taken houses down; they've torn a good community apart" (Janet); "Knocked all them buildings down … that area to me it's so sad" (Ros). The HMRI promised much but delivered very little, there was anger and lament: "… the people who belonged to the Klondyke are not getting what they were promised" (Marjorie); "I just found it very unfair, very unfair … I'm angry because I think we were done, definitely think we were done" (Irene); "…only three left on the street, ten years we were stuck there in limbo … we were the last out" (June C). There was a breaking up of community, relationships and a fragmentation life itself.

4.4 A reflective turn

Now that the Gift of Leaven has been extracted and defined there is a need to work the leaven back into the dough and to knead it through with voices from the academy. The leaven needs to be brought into a "process of interdisciplinary investigation and theological refection [leading to] freshly informed practice" (Pears, 2013, p. 89). It is akin to the praxis model that emerged out of the political theologies of liberation and cites all theological enquiry as being rooted in "concrete, historical and social experience as the 'first act' of theology, upon which the 'second act' of reflection is dependent" (Slee, 2004, p. 6). In this thesis it is the concrete storied experience of the Bootle women that is the 'first act'. The Gift of Leaven is then brought into a spiraling process of theological reflection, which has two reflective turns: the 'second act', from which a new feminist theological praxis for urban church is defined.

Fig 4.5 A reflective turn

Richard Osmer (2008) describes four core tasks of practical theological interpretation. There is a "descriptive-empirical task"; an "interpretive task" incorporating the use of social science enquiry (research) and drawing on

theoretical concepts; a "normative task" of bringing in the interplay of the Christian narrative; and finally, a "pragmatic task" of reflective conversation in which strategies for action are determined (Osmer, 2008, p. 4). This "four-fold movement" (Slee, 2004, p. 6) can be found embedded in various models of theological reflection: "the pastoral cycle" (Cameron, Reader & Slater, 2012, p. 5); a "cross cultural urban theological methodology" (Shannahan, 2010, p. 238); and Pears' "doing 'theology from story'" (2013, p. 89). Pears' (2013) approach is preferred "amongst marginalised communities, as it tends to make space for voices that are not often heard" (p. 89); it is also conducive with the aims of this thesis in which the starting place for theological reflection is the 'situational experience' of the Bootle women.

This chapter of my thesis has explored the TN that has been generated by the raw data of my research project. Each of the three global themes has been aligned with the women's own transcripts so that a sense is gained of the stories behind the themes and codes. The web-like illustration of the TN importantly reflects the interconnectivity of the women's stories and also the connectedness and mutual dependency of the three global themes (see Fig. 4.1). The process of data analysis now continues through a sustained period of theological reflection.

The next chapter of my thesis describes the first reflective turn. It is framed around the ordinary and everyday objects that define the women's lives. It is here that the Gift of Leaven, the distilled *phronēsis* of the Bootle women, is situated back into the *lo cotidiano* of the women and brought into theological conversation with voices from the academy. The strands of a new feminist theological praxis for urban church begin to emerge, defined further in the second reflective turn, that offers to the Church and the academy six theological fragments (Chapter 6).

Chapter 5. The Main Performance Act II Part i: Objects of the ordinary

> … a radical kenosis that not so much raise up as gaze down, touching the very depth of matter as it splits, fissures and proliferates and finds in the stone, the street, the dance, the dress the very flesh of God … sharing in the passion, the wounding and the glory of this living. This everyday life. This living God. (Walton, 2014, p. 185)

In my kitchen cupboard there is a tin of 'dried active yeast'. The date on the bottom of the tin is May 2013. The suggestion on the tin is that the grains of yeast should be 'reactivated' in order that bread can be baked. However, I doubt whether any reactivating can bring these grains of yeast back to life! My argument throughout this thesis has been that the women's stories contain leaven, grains of yeast that when activated cause the whole batch of dough to rise; that this leaven, the *phronēsis* of white working-class woman, has often been ignored within the Church and the academy; that it has in effect been left in the cupboard and its liberative potential lost.

In the baking of bread what happens to the leaven is that it becomes unidentifiable; it becomes part of the loaf and the grains of yeast are no longer distinguishable. There is a temptation within theology and praxis to try and find neat endings or particular models of application, to take the chaos and muddle of life and organise it into a system. Within practical theology there is a growing wisdom against too readily offering theological remedies to life's fissures and instead staying within the 'wounded middle' (Rambo, 2010). [25] There is a temptation now in this thesis to try to organise

[25] Rambo in her work *Spirit and Trauma* (2010) explores a theology of witness, claiming "Christian triumphalism" too readily seeks to gloss over the important place of trauma (p. 7): "The storm is gone, but 'after the storm' is always here" (p. 1). The 'wounded middle' signifies the "middle space" (Rambo, 2010, p. 171) where the witnesses of trauma speak into the space of Holy Saturday and generate new theological insights by "remaining [in the middle, between the] cross and resurrection" (Rambo, 2010, p. 144).

and elicit a model of praxis from the leaven and to turn the core global themes into a six-point plan for how the Church should engage in urban ministry. But, the reality of this research has always been that it is written into, and out of, a very messy and muddled urban context; there are cul-de-sacs and dead ends because life has cul-de-sacs and dead ends. What I offer instead is a new feminist theological praxis for urban church which has been generated by stories and fragments and provides a way of seeing and understanding the urban church through the *phronēsis* of the Bootle women.

This chapter of my thesis is the first reflective turn (see Fig. 4.5) in which the Gift of Leaven is brought into theological conversation with voices from the academy. The leaven is situated back into the stories of the women and the theological reflections are framed around the ordinary and everyday objects that define the women's lives, 'the dinosaur lamp', 'the house that died' … 'the open door'. These objects of the ordinary become holy objects (Lefebvre, 1991) and contain moments of revelation, providing new insights and generating new meaning. It is only as we entangle our very selves within the *lo cotidiano* of the women that new ways of seeing and feeling the urban begin to emerge (Pink, 2012).

The core global and organizing themes are explored within the objects of the ordinary; they are both topic and theme for the theological reflections. The thematic network acting as a lens through which the women's stories are brought into particular focus. For example, within the story of 'the dinosaur lamp', 'the death space' can be recognised in the 'tragic' of Margaret's death and in the breakdown of Marc's behaviour. The global theme of 'hope' is identifiable in the 'transformation and change' of Marc's behaviour; the importance of 'sacred space'; and the unspoken 'faith narrative'. The global theme of 'placed and particular' is present in the embodied 'relationships' of the community that form to look for the lamp and gather to release balloons. However, I have intentionally not ordered the ten reflections in a systematic way around the global and organizing themes, since in bread-making, the grains of leaven have now become

indistinguishable from the dough but are present nevertheless, littered within the stories and the women's lives.

We start this series of reflections with the story of 'the dinosaur lamp'. Narrative theory is my main method of enquiry and it has been important that the women's narratives are left intact and are not simply redacted into codes (Riessman, 2010). The following nine reflections then continue around the themes of the ordinary and everyday. We begin to gain a sense of what the Gift of Leaven looks like when it is active and present and situated in the *lo cotidiano* of the women's lives. It is the "orthopraxis" (Graham, 2009b, p. 13) found in the *phronēsis* of the Bootle women.

5.1 The dinosaur lamp

> I lost me friend and that's when me son ended up with emotional … and she had promised him a dinosaur lamp that she'd won in the bingo. And before we had chance to get it out the house her son emptied the house and took everything to the charity shop. We went round every charity shop looking for this dinosaur lamp and we couldn't find it. And then in the January he started running away from school. Social Services got involved and they said something must have happened at Christmas. I said we had a good Christmas, the only thing that was different were that Margaret's presents and Margaret not being there … Marc never cried he just bottled it all up. Two years he ran away from school, backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards …
>
> Then two-years after we lit some candles in church just to pay respect to Margaret and we set some balloons off but Marc's balloon disappeared. Me friend bought all the kids balloons to set off for her but Marc's balloon we couldn't find anywhere. So I said to him Aunty Margaret's come and she's took your balloon. And then on Friday he

> went to school and stayed in school the whole day. He sat on the window ledge in the kitchen and cried and went to school for the whole day ... And after we set the balloons off it was like he realised then and went to school and that was his first time he stayed in school for two years for a whole day. (Dawn)

The house clearance and loss of the dinosaur lamp had caused Marc's life to fall apart; like the drachma, that had fallen out of the woman's headdress causing her life and status to disintegrate (Luke 15:8). Unlike the coin, the lamp was never found. But the story of the 'lost coin' is just that, a parable, a story, inviting us into a space beyond our physicality, beyond the coin, the dinosaur lamp … and suddenly and unexpectedly we find ourselves on holy ground, in a different space. There was an unspoken Christian faith narrative woven into Dawn's story: the death of Margaret and the distress and grief expressed in Marc's behaviour; the Easter Saturday of looking for the dinosaur lamp; and church then as a place of gathering and new beginnings, through the lighting of candles and the letting go of balloons.

It took two years for the dinosaur lamp to be 'found', it took two years for the prayers of the 'persistent widow' to be heard. "Backward and forward, backward and forward" (Dawn) until finally "because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming" (Luke 18:5 [New Revised Standard Version]). Dawn may not have been physically articulating a prayer in words, but her embodied being was praying with every living fibre, longing and aching for Marc's life to be redeemed.

It is not clear how it happened; it is left to our own imagination, like the Gospel stories of old. Who suggested going to the church? Who bought the candles, said the prayers, were there any prayers? It was the friend who bought the balloons, but she has no name, like the woman at the well (John 4). Marc's balloon couldn't be found; "Aunty Margaret's come and she's took your balloon!" (Dawn). It was as if "at that very moment [Dawn's prayers]

were heard in the glorious presence of God" (Tobit 3:16 [New Revised Standard Version]). "He … cried" (Dawn), "Jesus began to weep" (John 11:35 [New Revised Standard Version]), "he realised" (Dawn). We are not sure, from the story what 'he realised'; just like the Gospel encounters, Mary realizing in the garden (John 20:18) and blind Bartimaeus being able to see (Mark 10:52).

Bons-Storm suggests it is the "acknowledgement of personhood" (1996, p. 30) that enables the realisation, the recognition. It was Marc being met, called by his own name and being taken utterly seriously. We do not know the extent of the realisation, the extent of the seeing, the extent of being recognized and recognizing. Maybe we do not need to know. The realisation was made manifest in Marc's own actions as he returned to school.

There was rawness to Dawn's life; an honesty and vulnerability that cuts through all the dross of life. It was not pretty, and she did not shy away from it; she was not proud of her life. Dawn felt most of the time that her life was 'shite'. Her life lived gasping for breath, and, just when the waves seemed to have overwhelmed, there was an interruption, a small crack in the darkness that lets just enough light through. This was manifested in the school bringing round a hamper, or in Clive sitting with Michael and watching football in his hospice bed, or the church decorating the house. These small acts of tenderness seemed to be just enough to hold and to stop the darkness from being utterly overwhelming. Yet I was left wondering, where was this God of abundance?

It is easy to pass Dawn by and walk on "on the other side" (Luke 10:31b [New Revised Standard Version]) because somehow her life repulses us. Or, to see Dawn as a 'charity case' that needs fixing, the Church somehow finding its sense of purpose through "magnanimously reaching out to the one the world turns its back on" (Wells, 2015, p. 92). The problem with this analogy is, as Wells suggests, that the well-meaning Christian is not the Good Samaritan in the story but the person in the gutter, the one who is

passed by (2015, p. 93). The normalized 'social action' reading of the story is inverted; Dawn's life paradoxically becoming the place in which the cup of life is held. It is fragile and obscured by the terrors of life. However, it is within Dawn's hands that the cup of life has been given, and it is through her life that my own life is redeemed. Dawn is the outsider; she is the one who is "despised, hated and ostracized, [the one] who brings salvation" (Wells, 2015, p. 92).

5.2 The house that died

> I stayed put in ours, was only three of us left in the street … There was nothing that was said for a long time so I said, 'Urh phone up' … We said, 'What we want to know, are we getting a house or are we getting a bungalow?' … So she said, 'No, you've got a bungalow.' ... So I said, 'Right!'
>
> So after that I mean the houses, they were lovely house but our house died about ten years ago. You know when nothing was going right in the house. It was always a very happy house, cause there was only one other family who lived in before us and the daughter found out I'd got it and she said, 'Well you're in a happy house!' Ten years we were stuck there in limbo, because the first big meeting was in 2000, to ask what do we want to be doing with the property? They wanted to modernize, and we said, 'Just pull um down! We want new property.' And, cause we were the last lot out, weren't we? (June C)

As the houses of the Klondyke were vacated, a notice was affixed to the front door: *"*Everything of value has been removed from this dwelling"*.* It was a haunting image of the decimating effect of the regeneration scheme; all of life had gone, everything of value had been removed. Tweed (2006) suggests that dwelling is not a static condition but is active and is located in both time and place. Dwelling is about how we find, locate and inhabit our

world; dwelling is how we get our sense of being; "it is homemaking" (Ibid. p. 82). So when 'our dwelling' is being threatened, it is not just the bricks and mortar that are being removed but our whole sense of being. How can a house die, one may ask? How can a house not die? June's house died along with the houses of her neighbours and friends, it died ten years before she was relocated. It turned from a happy house to a sad house, no longer a place of dwelling but a place of death.

The women's sense of belonging was rooted in their sense of place: "I have lived here all my life" (Ros); "I was born in Bootle … it has always just been home" (Johanna). The women's narratives were etched into the physical reality of place. Lives were framed around street names: Province; Eleanor; Edith; and Monfa. There was an embedded memory of time and place and an ebb and flow of life mapped out by streets and factories:

> When we were going to school you'd see crowds of people, crowds of people going to the factories cause there were factories all along Hawthorne Road … we'd all be marching off, we'd go to school and the men would go, the women would go to the factories and that and then you'd all come home for dinner. (Irene)

Life was mapped out by the physical landscape; it was how the women related to each other and their community. It was "the Triangle" of buildings and roads that created a sense of community for Ros and her neighbours as they came together and saved for coach trips and summer days out: "… and everyone who lived on that Triangle used to put money into a little savings. Think it was only 50p a week and come the six-week holidays all that money went together and we'd have coach trips" (Ros).

The late urban geographer Doreen Massey's account of the Wythenshawe Estate in Manchester describes how the physical environment affects a person's sense of being, from the cracks in the paving slabs to the milk bottles on the doorstep (2001). "Cities are the repositories of memories, and

they are one of memory's texts … Our lives and struggles, and those of our ancestors, are written into places … investing them with meaning and significance" (Sandercock, 2003, p. 222). The view that Sandercock (2003) holds is that in our urban design all value of the past has been erased in the interest of progress as "modernist planners [become] thieves of memory" (p. 222).

The women held a nostalgic view of life within the community; how it used to be. It was a "brilliant, absolutely brilliant place to live" (Marjorie); "It was safe, you played in the street and you were safe in the street" (Marjorie); "You could leave your door open, your front door open and leave money on the counter … no one would go in and touch it" (June C). Irene spoke about how the Klondyke "was like an island" where everybody knew each other, and you felt protected from the outside world. The concern and anger around the regeneration scheme was this loss of place and community. The demolition of homes and buildings caused a collective grieving of place: "… it broke me heart … it did, I think the whole street was crying that day" (Janet). What was most painful for Irene was the ripping of the relationships within the community, having to break the promise to her neighbour that they would move together:

> … was leaving Thelma and John … I was torn totally, I could remember me heart was so heavy it was awful after forty odd years of living next door to one another… I felt guilty because we always said we'd move together. (Irene)

The HMRI destroyed many of the "assemblages and associations" (Latour, 2005) within the community. It destroyed the very fabric of the social and the making of community and belonging. The area became a 'no man's land'. There was an exodus of community and a fragmentation of life: "The next minute you had a pile of neighbours and the next minute they'd gone. I don't know where they went" (June W). There was fear, anger, and lament. A feeling of being trapped and unable to move: "I couldn't move because I

couldn't buy a house" (June C); a feeling of abandonment: "The houses in front of us were all set on fire … ten years we were stuck there in limbo … cause we were the last out" (June C). The HMRI had failed to deliver what had been promised:

> They put a plan in one of the shops in the Strand … it looked brilliant and what it was was all the people who were living in the Klondyke would get these houses but that hasn't happened … the people who belonged to the Klondyke are not getting what they were promised. (Marjorie)

There was a sense of injustice about the amount of compensation offered, particularly to homeowners. Most homeowners had already paid off their mortgage, their homes were an inheritance, a security they could pass on to their children. The scheme had promised 'like for like' but the reality was far from this ideal. Homeowners were not given enough money to buy another property and there were not enough rented properties being built.

> I found it very unfair, very unfair. Especially when people who rented their homes were getting a lot more disturbance than we were … if they'd just given us decent money for the houses that would have taken the burden off us … And it's that I'm angry with cause I think we were done, definitely think we were done ... (Irene)

For the first time within the community a tension arose between those in rented houses and those who owned their own homes. Not only was the HMRI fragmenting a community it was also dividing it. Minton (2009) argues that this division of a community, had been underhandedly engineered into the Pathfinder Programme. Communities were deliberately run down, to fit in with the legal requirements of the Pathfinder that stated an area must be "underused or ineffectively used" (Minton, 2009, p. 88). In Merseyside a number of housing associations confirmed that they had "kept their properties vacant to speed clearance" (Ibid).

The old assemblages, the glue that held the tightknit community together had been dismantled. In the place of "neatly preserved rows where streets once stood … I had the … feeling of a ghostly place left with only memories hanging in the air" (Minton, 2009, p. 103).

> They haven't just taken the houses down; they've torn a good community apart. People who have been neighbours for years … twenty and thirty years. They are all scattered now and I see them and they say they are made up with the new house but they'd rather live in the old house and have the neighbours they had … So yeah, there is a big hole in the community now. (Janet)

It seemed that 'real people' had been written out of the equation: "They don't care of anything else so long as they are building houses and earning their money" (Michelle). Lynsey Hanley (2012) also makes a similar point in her observations on the making of estates in Britain:

> A sense that someone, who lives in a proper house, in a proper town, sat on the floor of an office one day with a fancy box of Lego bricks and laid out, with mathematical precision, a way of housing as many people as possible in as small a space as could be got away with. And, in so doing, forgot that real people aren't inanimate yellow shapes with permanent smiles branded on their plastic bodies. That real people might get lost in such a place. (Hanley, 2012, p. 5)

5.3 The step

> He was always on the step wasn't he, always sitting on the step. (June W)

June was talking about Keith, who had been moved into one of the new flats on the site of the Old Regal Cinema. Keith loathed his new flat and sat all the

time looking out of the window. The step used to be the place of meeting and encounter in the community, "… if I wanted to see anybody… I'd go and stand on the step" (June W).

The new community had been designed without steps and places of meeting. Instead of encouraging meeting and encounter, the city had been designed to enforce a "silencing and conformity" (Glasson, 2006, p. 34). Sandercock argues that within the design of the city there needs to be space for the 'songline', a place where stories can be kept alive and memories of the past transformed into future possibilities (2003, p. 227).

Without 'the step' there was no opportunity for "a thirsty Jewish man and a struggling bucket-carrying Samaritan woman" (Glasson, 2006, p. 34) to encounter each other. The loss of this place of encounter within the community took with it the opportunity for healing and life. The thirsty Jew and the woman meet at a well. It was a place of meeting, but, without 'the step', the well, Keith remained locked in his new flat gazing aimlessly out of the window; not even hope abided.

5.4 The field

> The other thing I remember as well was in the war there used to be an opening at the top of the road, a gate, Aspinal's Field, remember that? And they came and they put flooring down that you could have open air dancing in the field, it was brilliant. I don't' know whether it was Rita Fume who came, well somebody came put a great big horn, well I call it a horn, microphone thing and they played and you know everybody and the old people would come with their chairs and sit round. (Marjorie)

The field is still present within the community. I remember one Easter morning getting up early and holding the Easter Vigil on top of the mound in

Aspinal's Field. There seemed to be something profound and prophetic about proclaiming the resurrection in a forgotten field that was little more than a dog's toilet. We were surrounded by derelict properties and the confidence of the Gospel seemed difficult to embody. But, was this not what the Gospel was about? It was the story of the dry bones coming back to life (Ezekiel 37) and of Lazarus rising from the dead (John 11), of the widow's mite (Luke 21:1-4) and the parting of the Red Sea (Exodus 14). Like Keith, I was finding it hard to see beyond the present awfulness of the situation.

I decided that it was time 'we' reclaimed the land. It was a defiant act, an embodied acting out of the resurrection hope. I remember the park warden saying that the park's department were no longer allocating any resources to Aspinal's Field as they did not think anyone still lived there. I secured funding and drew others together, church, community, and the local park's department. Together, over a five-day period, we reclaimed Aspinal's Field. On the derelict properties we painted large colourful murals that depicted the four seasons. On the mound we planted crocus and narcissi. Within the dirt and soil of our community we embodied the hope, "that the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing" (Isaiah 35:1-2 [New Revised Standard Version]).

Fig.5.1 Summer Time (Dawson, C. 2014, August. Unpublished)

Reflecting on Sandercock's work, I can see now that Aspinal's Field had become a 'songline' for us in our community (2003, p. 227). The memories of Marjorie's dance had been brought back to life but they had also been transformed by a future hope. There was now a new community coming together. Over the five-day period there was laughter and conversation, we ate together and shared stories of life and living. At a time when our community was in desolation and all Keith could do was gaze out of his window, we redeemed a small area of our community and brought Aspinal's Field back to life.

5.5 A knock on the door

> Knock on the door Tom comes in wanting some food … Tape goes off for a bit. (Johanna's Transcript)

Our interview was interrupted. It was the interruptions that brought conversations into the present time and demonstrated the three-dimensional nature of life in the urban. The interviews were not linear. Life was not linear and could not be described with straight lines. Life was social and not static. As the narratives of the women were told, and heard and reheard, I was aware that their narratives were a matrix of interweaving webs of the social, the familiar, the sacred and the material. They were individual stories but each story was woven into a layered tapestry of life and being within the community. What was expressed within the stories was the essence of the social, of what it means to live within community.

The interruptions seemed important and should not be written out: the '999 call' Johanna made to the Police, interrupting the cycle of abuse; the 'knock on the door' during my interview with Dawn, when the school delivered a food parcel; the neighbour coming round to Janet's to ask if she wanted a cigarette and whether she was going to the shops; the constant 'panting of the dog', making us ever-mindful of the present time.

The life of the urban church was marked by interruptions. On a wider scale, the whole of life within the community was interrupted when the bulldozers came and started to demolish what had been. The church narrative was interrupted as its buildings gave way to a new housing scheme, and its planned rebuild was interrupted by the banking crisis of 2008. Interruptions crisscrossed throughout the narratives of community and church; they were the places of 'rub', where life from the past was suddenly thrust into tension with the present.

Rowan Williams tells the story of Mary as she is weaving the cloth for the veil in the sanctuary. "But as Mary labours away at this sign of separation, holy fear, she is interrupted at her work; God, you could say, steps through the veil [her]self" (2002, p. 63). The interruptions are times when God marks us; they are times of intersection when the past is brought into sharpness with the present. God marked Mary with the impregnation of the Holy Spirit, when Mary's life and God's life interrupted each other. The interruptions are places where God can intervene, but we also struggle to see God in the interruptions because we like things to be ordered and neat. We like to know where we are going. Yet, it is precisely at the point when we do not know where we are going that God then reveals her plans and purposes. Life in the urban is not neat and tidy. It is made up of layer upon layer of interruptions that somehow hold together; the interruptions simply becoming part of the fabric of being, of life.

5.6 A cup of tea

> When (me dad) was dying and when he was at home the vicar ... urm he came knocking cause someone had told there was a very ill man … And me dad, 'If you're not going to preach you are welcome in my house' … He never had a faith, never had a belief but allowed the vicar to just sit in his house and just talk to him … never mentioned

> anything about church related thing anything, just sat and talked and had a cup of tea with me dad. (Ros)

This memory had somehow stayed with Ros since she was eight years old as if it were yesterday. Of all the women interviewed, Ros was the only one who would class herself as a non-believer:

> I'm not religious in any way. I have no faith in anything like that … I've got to see to believe. Urh, I don't want to insult you but the Bible to me is like a book … There's no belief there cause me dad was an unbeliever. (Ros)

However, the memory of her dad having 'a cup of tea' with the vicar had made its mark. It had interrupted a timeline and brought Ros and her dad into association with the church. Ros remembers the vicar's meeting with her dad, and when I became part of the community Ros became friends with me: "I remember … and dad's attitude rubbed off on me … so it was you that introduced me to the, not church side of things I suppose, but to *a* church …" (Ros).

Ros spoke later of a time when she would go into a church on Scotland Road and "light a candle":

> That's just cause that's me dad and I think it resembled something. I needed something to over bare the grief … and that's what churches are for; for me they are sanctuary … So, a church for this community is needed desperately and your church has to be the upholder of it. It's got to be up holded hasn't it? … I don't think there is a community without a church. (Ros)

From the place of a 'non-believer', Ros held a profound view of the role of church within the community. She had an understanding of the place of church as sanctuary, an impression that was also held by the other women

in the study: “So I went to church and it was the best hour and half I ever had … it was my time … church was me sanctuary…” (Johanna). Church was a place where God could be found nearby and present and where the wounds of life could be held. Church provided a safe harbour and sanctuary, as did other organisations within the community including the Venus Centre, Sefton’s Women’s Aid and Marsh Lane Family Centre. These were all sanctuaries for the women, places of welcome and healing that suggested a concept of ‘church’ beyond the purvey of established religion.

Karen’s life was perhaps the most fragmented of all of the women interviewed. She seemed not to have any roots and had come to Bootle “for Wayne, cause the toilet was downstairs” (Karen). Karen lived in the Old Klondyke in a private rented house. When I first visited Karen, the front windows were boarded-up, and there was no light in the house: “It was just horrible … derelict houses, they were getting knocked down weren’t they, but we didn’t know they were getting knocked down” (Karen). Karen’s life was marked by a constant battle with alcohol but somewhere within the chaos she encountered God. For Karen, God was defined as church and church was defined as God. She met ‘God’ when Josh died: “I went to his funeral and met some lovely people … and I thought, I felt brilliant when I came out of church … so I thought to meself, ‘I’m doing this every week’” (Karen). Karen associated going to church with believing in God. When she ‘fell out with God’ she stopped going to church, “… cause I fell out with God cause he took Wayne and Barry away” (Karen).

There was something intrinsic within me that wanted ‘to fix’ Karen’s story and life. I had the same feeling when I left Dawn’s house. I just wanted to pay off the loan shark, buy a roll of wallpaper and fill the cupboards up with food. Sam Wells (2015) categorises this as the human predicament that we have for ‘“doing good”’ (p. 33) and offers an alternative way of understanding the human predicament, namely that of “being with” (p. 43). For Wells, the fundamental flaw within society is not that of illness or death but that of being isolated:

> In other words, a heaven that is simply and only about overcoming mortality is an eternal life that is not worth having. It is not worth having because it leaves one alone forever. And being alone forever is not a description of heaven. It is a description of hell. (Wells, 2015, p. 43)

"Thus every dimension of theology finds its telos in God being with us" (Wells, 2015, p. 9). God's essence, or resolve, is simply to 'be with'. This concept of 'being with' held true within the accounts and narratives of the women. Their lives were not a social project and no amount of 'doing good' would ever 'fix them'. Church was quite simply "being with God, one another, and ourselves, and celebrating and embodying the ways restoration takes place" (Wells, 2015, p. 9).

We want to make order out of chaos and make straight that which God has made crooked (Ecclesiastes 7:13). Yet, it is in the chaos and the mundane, "the unformed mess of living" (Walton, 2014, p. 178), the ordinary of everyday life that "moments" (Ibid, p. 179) occur. Lefebvre's, *Critique of Everyday Life* (2014) suggests that culture, as embodied in the abstract arts of philosophy and theology, can distract from the profundity of the everyday (p. 651). Culture selects and unifies the moment, whereas "it is in everyday life that this painstaking labour of selection and unification unfolds" (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 651). As Walton describes, "it is the matter of daily life that sustains the human … [and] gives daily life its liberative potential" (2014, p. 178).

It was 'a cup of tea' which was the start of all of this reflection, an ordinary mundane act at the heart of urban life and urban church. I interviewed Marjorie, June and June together as a group conversation. We sat round June's coffee table in her front sitting room, eating Battenberg Cake and drinking tea; as Abraham sat at the entrance to his tent when the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre (Genesis 18:1). It was here that Abraham and Sarah offered hospitality, "a little water… a little bread [… a

cup of tea]", to the three angels who visited them (Genesis 18:4,5 [New Revised Standard Version]). It was over the sharing of 'a cup of tea', the 'curds and milk', that God interrupted the timeline of Sarah and Abraham as Sarah was promised a child. It was the same 'cup of tea' that interrupted Ros's timeline and also created a place of meeting and encounter in June's front sitting room. Here the hidden songlines of the women were shared, old wounds tended, memories rekindled, and new hopes dreamed.

The 'cup of tea' was a place of welcome and encounter, where the host was both the welcomer and the visitor, the giver and the gift. It was a mutual encounter. The church as a building was also recognised as a place of welcome where God was the metaphorical friend who would come round to share 'a cup of tea': "It was just like a neighbour wasn't it? The house over the road with bricks yeah … It was just like a neighbour… You could just go over and go in, have a coffee" (Debbie). The physicality of the church as bricks and mortar was translated into a place of relations and meeting. A distant God became intimate, her presence being embodied in her community in and through the meetings and relationships. It was as if the cups of tea became the springs in the desert, signs of God's own presence and becoming. It was through 'just a chat and a cup of tea' that Dawn found church and Janet found salvation.

> When I said church saved me life it really did because if I hadn't believed that urm Max was with Jesus I think I'd have lost it … We just used to go to talk about anything, where it were debts or days out or something someone was struggling with a marriage. And we'd all sit and listen and we'd talk about it and you'd come away from there feeling good and you'd make a friend that you never think that you would make friends with … just being able to sit down somewhere warm with smiling faces around you and being able to talk to someone. Even if it's someone who is just lonely, and they want a gab and a cuppa tea. It does a lot. (Janet)

5.7 The old floor

> It's lovely, it is. It's dead welcoming. It feels … I don't know how can a building be; I don't know. When you were in Springwell it felt like you were in a school hall … and when I walked into St John & St James it was like … Wow! … It just made me feel like … I was home … and the old floor's still there, which me mum used to teach dancing off ... So it used to bring a lot of memories, and I showed me mum the pictures I took pictures of the floor and then the gorgeous beautiful cross … But it felt like I was at home; not this home but I felt like I belonged there. (Dawn)

Dawn was speaking about her first visit to the New St John & St James. It was the culmination of a long thirty-year journey for the church and a similarly long pilgrimage for Dawn herself.

The old church buildings were a significant landmark and sacred space within the community: "They were like figure heads … if you wanted to say to anybody well if you know St John & St James Church well it's round there…" (Marjorie); "When I used to work in Vernon's and I used to come along Monfa I'd see the church and I'd feel safe; it's as if it's a sign … that God hasn't deserted us …" (Irene). As the church buildings were demolished there was a profound sense that the community had been forgotten and that even God had abandoned them.

We met as a church in Springwell Park School from 2010 until 2015. For these five years Dawn could not bring herself to come into 'church'. Something had been lost when the church buildings, the sacred spaces, were pulled down, and that something was God's own presence from her community. The restoration came in the new building, heard in Dawn's narrated account of her first visit to the New St John & St James. The connection to the past was not lost in her attention being drawn to the old flooring which was the original chapel floor on which her mum took dance

classes. The floor was a place of connection to the past, a holder of memories, but it was also an embodiment of presence and future hope. The floor enabled Dawn to reconnect with her Christian community finding herself to be "at home". Dawn's attention was also drawn to the cross that had been installed; there was a sense of "Wow!", of something other. The cross generated beauty, a beauty that Dawn seldom found in her own life.

What emerged from the narratives of the women was the need for sacred space within their own lives and the lives of the community. There was something about the physical presence of the church building that provided a holy space and a sanctuary, the women's own storied history being woven into the actual bricks and mortar of the building.

> If you are looking at your history and you are looking back then things that were part of your life are sort of gone. Like the school and church building umm … I mean apart from what I was saying about being christened there, me mum got married there, I got married there, me three children they've all been christened in church, so like that was sad to see it go. (Carol)

The building was the first point of connection and nearly always through a rite of passage: a baptism; a funeral; a wedding. It was the place where, "Our Iris got buried …" (Marjorie) or for Janet where her son's funeral had taken place, "He was stillborn; that's how I come to go to church" (Janet). It was Josh's funeral that first took Karen to church, but then she "met some lovely people" (Karen). It was the building that gave the first invitation, but it was then within the people that the holy presence of God dwelt and it was this God that Karen was drawn too: "I felt brilliant when I come out of church … so I thought to meself, 'I'm doing this every week'" (Karen). Carol had 'gone to church' to hear her wedding banns being read. Again, it was the building as church that provided the first invitation, but then the conversations started. The building, the church, was the door to the beginnings of relationships and belonging. It was the threshold, the liminal space between

people's lives and their lived faith. The church building was the seat of relationships both within the gathered Christian community and also between people and God.

> I sort of came back to church … when James and me were getting married and umm … I remember coming for me banns to be read and Mark and Sarah were sitting in front and I started talking to Mark … so that sort of started the connection. (Carol)

Irene's narrative depicted the church building as representing the incarnational presence of the living God. For Irene it was the church building itself that became the medium through which God's own desires were communicated in the sense of 'being with'; that somehow, in the awfulness of loss of home and community and promise, God understood because God's own building was also being demolished. The church building became the physical incarnation of God's own self:

> Cause I used to get up every morning, or the middle of the night really and I look out the window in Eleanor and there's always, I don't know if it's a planet, a star what. Always a star there and I always thought of the passage in the Bible and it says, 'I am the bright morning star' and I'd look at that and I'd go, 'I know Lord you're not leaving me, I know' ... The church and that's no coincidence that the church had come down at the same time. It was as if God was saying to me, 'I'm losing mine as well' … It wasn't that God had pain; he had understanding. It wasn't the pain; it was the understanding. He was saying, 'It's got to go, it's got to go, but I understand.' (Irene)

Carol's 'songline' was also marked by the incarnational reality of the church building. Everything she had known and knew was bound by her lived sense of place within this small community. Carol lamented that she had "stayed at home too long … I didn't sort of branch out." Carol's narrative was marked by missed opportunities and unfulfilled ambition. Carol had wanted to be a

nurse yet she had drifted instead into secretarial work. As Carol's story unfolded I had a sense of "how much of Carol's hope/future is tide up with St John & St James' hope and future" (Research Journal, 10th February 2015). On leaving the old church Carol said, "I'm not living in the past … It was sad to leave the church, but I was really quite optimistic when we left that day… (laugh). Yeah, I thought; yeah, time to move on." Carol's hopes and longings were tied up in the hopes and longings of the church. The church building enabled Carol to express her own desires and regrets and gave her permission to dream dreams. Carol dreamed that the new building would be constantly in use, but within her dream was also a wondering about herself, "What's God got in store for me?" (Carol). The building embedded a lived reality in which lament and future hope could be expressed and lived.

Carol's narrative was pitted with laughter. The laughter undermined her optimism for a future hope and almost ridiculed the prospect that her own life could have any meaning and purpose beyond that of being a carer to her family. Within the Hebrew narrative it was laughter that marked the promise of salvation and future hope for Israel through the life of a wife and soon-to-be mother. Overhearing the angel's promise that she should bear a child, Sarah "laughed to herself" at the preposterousness of the idea (Genesis 18:12 [New Revised Standard Version]). However, God responded by saying simply, "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord?" (Genesis 18:14 [New Revised Standard Version]). Carol's songline crossed over and connected with the ancient Hebrew songline of Sarah. It was within the women's shared laughter that the future promises of God were revealed to them in possibilities coming to birth.

5.8 The buddleia

> Where there is no life there are
> buddleia's – where there are just

> cracks left the buddleia takes hold.
> Now at the heart of summer
> she blooms purple-headed flowers
> that scream out life …
> (Dawson, 2016, pp. 143-144)

Rob Cowen in his book *Common Ground* (2015) poetically writes about the land and his relationship with it. In the chapter entitled 'Metamorphoses' he encounters the buddleia: "I've found *Buddleia daviddi* growing on the dismantled railway!" (Cowen, 2015, p. 243). Cowen had encountered as I had the shocking beauty of this once foreign species that had escaped over its original wall of Kew Gardens and was now finding life in every crack the land had to offer.

In July 2014 the Klondyke Estate had all but died and just boarded-up houses remained. Yet, from the paving slabs and every crack of mortar somehow *Buddleia daviddi* had taken its hold and was refusing to give way. Its iridescent purple flowers cut through the 'death knell' hanging over the community and somehow hope was restored; there was – is – a metamorphosis. It was this metamorphosis and resilience to life that was found in and amongst the stories and the lives of the women. A resilience that managed to find home in the most unlikely and life-foreboding places and made something good out of what appeared, to all sense and purposes, to be lifeless and decaying.

> It was a terrible struggle but I did get by. Cause it's no use saying, I can remember one particular day, well it was an evening … when you have, it's no use saying it's only ten pence if you haven't got ten pence to put in the, which I didn't I didn't have ten pence to put into the meter, or half a crown whatever it'd used to be. I think it was ten pence the old ten pence's and I didn't have it you know till the next day and me mum gave me. (Irene)

The voices of the urban women spoke collectively of a resilience to life. In the face of what appeared to be destruction and desolation and despair they somehow managed to cling to the fragments of life. In situations that would have defeated others, the women had an ability to take hold of the finest of threads and hang-on-in-there. All of the women had 'lived on the edge' and had known what it was to have nothing: "Nothing. We had nothing … we never had two pennies to rub together!" (Ros,). There was resourcefulness, an ability to make something out of nothing and a generosity.

> I thought, 'Right!' So I put the little fella in the pram and I marched round the Klondyke knocking on doors. 'Would you like to join me club and I'm having a baby.' [There was also the opportunity to earn £8 from out-work], they'd give you a load of sacks and a load of envelopes and things you had to fill … you'd see us all with prams marching up to Vernon's taking them back to get this £8. (Irene)

It is this ability to see beyond the death – the crucifixion – that Rita Nakashima Brock picks up in her book, *Journeys by Heart* (1988). For Brock, it is the woman at Bethany who holds a space in the face of death and opens the "circle of healing that is completed in the return of women to the grave" (1988, p. 96).

> This woman, as a woman, represents the revelatory and healing power of heart. She becomes prophet and healer by her act as representative of the Christa/Community that would survive Jesus' death and witness his resurrection. She anoints Jesus. (Brock, 1988, p. 97)

At the end of Luke's Gospel it is the women who return to the tomb, having prepared spices and ointments (Luke 23:56). The women stay as witnesses to the death and also as foreseers to the resurrection. They do not abandon the dead Christ(a) but continue to hold the death space. It is the women from Bootle who also hold the space in the face of death and abandonment.

Johanna had been trapped by an abusive marriage, until one-day she just realised and had to make a decision:

> Till one day an instant happened and I just thought I could die now and there's no one … so I made a sneaky phone call to Sefton Women's and just said, 'Come and get me!'… Sometimes it makes me think, 'Was I stupid?' and then I think, 'Wow! What a life I've had!' … You know people, some people have one situation and they can never get over it. And yet I've had that situation, then I had the mental and physical abuse, then I had someone set fire to themselves in front of me. And yet here I am today, and I've always said, that's why I put faith there: God has a plan and a purpose. (Johanna)

Janet witnessing to the effects on her life of being a heroin addict and 'the journey' she had been on:

> But then I don't know whether I'd be where … I would have had the journey I'd have had from losing the baby and drugs and losing me mum and dad … I needed the whole journey from me son till now to understand a lot, it's opened my eyes a lot … If I was younger I'd go to Africa me I'd do missionary work and build wells and stuff. (Janet)

The Bootle women held a witness with the Gospel women and the woman at Bethany. The terror of the crucifixion and the death space of the Easter Saturday were an embodied reality. However, the Bootle women were also witnesses to the resurrection and the "healing power of heart" (Brock, 1988, p. 97). This took them beyond the abuse and drug addiction to a place of generative empathy and compassion: "But I also feel I've got the ability to help others that have been through them circumstances … I think I could walk a mile in their shoes" (Johanna); "Because I've experienced it and some of the stories why people use are just heart breaking … so I see addicts in the streets now and it's not that I feel sorry for them but it's … I understand" (Janet).

5.9 Cupcakes

> I just want to be the best mum I can be, give them the best start in life … When I was seventeen they told me that I weren't going to be able to have kids and then since then I've had two of them, so the fact is they are a gift. (Michelle)

The place of children within the women's narratives was fundamental. All the women were mothers, and children were the reason and purpose for their lives. Central to Michelle's story was the primacy of her children; all of her being went into trying "to be the best mum" she could be. She saw her children as a precious gift from God, recognising both the gift and the giver. God was near when her son was born, and baptism was Michelle's way of acknowledging this gift.

Prior to having children, Michelle had tried to 'escape' from Bootle, had moved to Spain with her then partner, but things hadn't worked out. "I actually missed being round here and all that. Seems pretty mad, go away to thingy and miss it anyway and come back" (Michelle). Her life now revolved around caring; caring for her Nan, her cousins, and her children.

It was difficult to 'hear Michelle into speech' as if her story had not been told before. The interview was "painful and stilted" (Research Journal, 22nd July 2015). The conversation started to flow when Michelle talked about cakes; making cakes: "I do all cupcakes and make me own gateaux urm … I do all cookies and things and I do birthday cakes" (Michelle). It was as if Michelle became alive when she baked, giving her pleasure and purpose. The cakes were always for her family, and her baking connected the stories of her children with her own life. Salvation imprinted herself on Michelle's life through the making of a cupcake!

For Debbie the good things in her life were "… me kids and family and everything what I've got round me. Yeah, me family." Family was the 'social

glue' that held her fragmented life together. Children were a consistent thread of salvation woven into the women's narratives. It would not matter if they had to do without, so long as the children had enough. Children were the reason Irene 'door-knocked' to sell her catalogue and the reason why June wanted to protect her son from the knowledge that when she died he would be evicted from his home:

> When I die, God forbid, my son would get it rent-free cause he's on the sick, but looking at things now between us he won't get my house. If I die now he won't get my house … my biggest, biggest worry … my son doesn't know this. (June W)

There was a powerful maternal instinct present within the narratives, which shaped and drew the women's lives beyond their own needs and circumstances. All of Ros' resources went into trying to do the best for her children; she was totally committed to them:

> You've got no money, so you can't have a good life in that way but you try and do your best, don't you? … Try and make a happy home, a happy life for your kids cause that's what I live for now, me kids … My kids are my life. (Ros)

Dawn was more distressed about not being able to afford £10 for wallpaper, not because of herself but because of her children: "Whereas my life at the minute is unbearable but I don't feel sorry for meself … I feel sorry for the kids" (Dawn). Dawn was tired and exhausted from working fourteen-hour days and would have given up, if it was not "for the kids … But my life, I chose my life. My kids haven't chose the life I give them. And it is hard … It's the kids that suffer… I can get on with it" (Dawn). This was at the heart of Dawn's story: her life and pain were threaded through the story of her children, her children holding the thinnest of separations between life and death.

5.10 The open door

> Front door's unlocked. Well you can go past my house, Claire, nine times out of ten, as you know front door wide open. I don't lock it I don't shut it … If you're a friend you will enter because the front door is open I have left it for you to just walk in. If you are my friend, I trust you … and that's the way I look at life … If I close me front door I've then, I feel I've given in on my community because I can't trust no one because I've got nothing to offer. I might not have nothing to offer but I've got meself. (Ros)

Ros's front door was always open; it was never closed. Her open door was symbolic of the trust she saw in her community. To close her door would be to give up on her community, and she was not prepared to do that. Ros reminded me of the shepherd and the sheepfold. The sheep trust the shepherd and know his voice and he knows them (John 10:3-4, 14). Ros's door was also symbolic of God's door, the church door always being open. Once the door had closed, the trust had gone; and community and friendship ties were broken.

Giles Fraser (2017) reflects on the devastating effects of the Grenfell Tower disaster and the crucial place of the small 'unsuccessful' urban church that at three a.m., on the morning of the fire simply "opened the doors and turned the lights on" (Ibid).

> In poor parishes, the job is to keep the door open and the lights on. And this being permanently present is no small thing. Not least because, as Christians believe, the light will always beckon people out of the darkness. (Fraser, 2017)

It seemed strange that it was Ros, the one who did not believe in God, who still had faith to keep her door open and saw that as a metaphor to the church door being open and present. I was reminded of Bevans and

Schroeder and of "being open to be evangelised by those who we are evangelising" (2011, pp. 20-22). Ros was certainly evangelising me.

5.11 Summary

In this chapter the Gift of Leaven has been spiralled through with voices from the academy, in the first reflective turn. New insights and understandings have been generated from the ordinary and the everyday; the stands of a new feminist theological praxis for urban church have begun to emerge.

This new feminist theological praxis for urban church is unique and particular to the Bootle women. It is characterised through simple gestures of kindness where a 'cuppa of tea' becomes a place for new beginnings. It expresses a resilience to life and a holding onto the thinnest of threads, where children and church buildings gift a sacredness to life. This new praxis generates an understanding of 'church' beyond that of organised religion, where the cup of salvation is held by those on the margins. It recognises the importance of the physicality of place which defines and holds the women's own sense of being and identity. The awfulness of life is not shied away from but held and attended to in the myriad of relations that go into defining the urban. 'Songlines' emerge out of the mess and chaos of urban life, where the possibility of the new can be dreamed as past memories are rekindled and re-encountered. However, I am left wondering where the God of abundance is.

In the following chapter the Gift of Leaven is taken into a second reflective turn. This generates six theological fragments; further defining this new feminist theological praxis for urban church. This new praxis emerging through fragments and stories, for this, I have argued, provides more of a lasting hope than arborescently produced practices and theologies.

Chapter 6. The Main Performance Act II Part ii: Theological fragments

> Her story was not just *about* illness. The story was told *through* a wounded body. The stories that ill people tell come out of their bodies. The body sets the need for new stories when disease disrupts the old stories. The body, whether still diseased or recovered, is simultaneously cause, topic, and instrument of whatever new stories are told. (Emphasis in the original; Frank, 2013, p. 2)

Arthur Frank (2013) writes in his book *The Wounded Storyteller* that an ill person finds themselves in places of lostness, without maps and a destination. The ill person has a need to think differently in order to construct new stories, new possibilities and new maps. They learn this by hearing themselves tell their stories (Frank, 2013, p. 1).

I could not help finding Arthur Frank's words resonate with the wounded and diseased community in Bootle. The community had in many ways been quite literally written off the map. The old stories had gone as the buildings were demolished that held the fabric of life together, in and through the social web of assemblages and associations. I remember Clare McBeath suggesting that the disease and illness of the local community was reflected within the disease and illness of the church; that the church was just as wounded as the community in which it was placed (2009, p. 147). When the story that we have is ended, we need new stories and new maps.

What has been created in this thesis is a new story for urban church out of the wounded body of the Bootle women. This 'new story' has been defined through a thematic network, yet this was never intended to be a praxis that would 'sit on the shelf'. Its real purpose is for the *phronēsis*, the Gift of Leaven, to be activated and kneaded back into the dough so "that the

fragments may be put to use in various ways for the welfare and salvation of women and men" (Forrester, 2005, p. 19).

This chapter describes the second reflective turn (see Fig. 4.2) in which the Gift of Leaven is brought into another spiralling conversation with voices from the academy. Michael Paterson states: "Reflection is a sustained, disciplined, spiritual practice which consists of looking, looking and looking again, until what is seen provokes wonder, insight and responses in the beholder" (2018). It is as the leaven is kneaded back into the dough for a second time and in the looking and looking and looking again that wonder is provoked; new insights generated; and new meanings constructed.

In the first reflective turn, the strands of a new feminist theological praxis for urban church began to emerge. This new praxis is now further defined and refined through six theological fragments. The fragments are not going to form a pretty picture; that is not their purpose. They are there merely as fragments, pieces of a jigsaw to be offered up so the whole wounded body can be fed. My argument is that these fragments offer more of a lasting hope than the current arborescent urban theologies of the Church. The fragments are rhizomatic and emerge outside the purview of organised religion and theology (Baker, 2013). They distil light in which we catch glimpses of the divine. Importantly the fragments reprioritise the divine bias to the poor, in which something of the 'mystery' of God is revealed (Sobrino, 2008, p. 72).

> Nearing the end,
> needing now to write … really write
> to dig deep and to mine out the fragments
> to hold our story and its telling
> to wonder at the possibility
> of newness coming into the world.
> (Research Journal, 5th February 2018)

6.1 Fragment one: "I don't know what made me think that was heaven" (Dawn)

It was a statement; not at all hesitant. It was heaven. These were Dawn's thoughts as she looked out of the hospice window. She was sitting on Michael's bed just before he died, the same bed that she had sat on three days earlier when they were married. Everything about the situation and Dawn's life in particular was tragic, just struggling on a daily basis to survive. Yet, here she was offering back to me a moment of transcendence and sheer beauty. The way she spoke, the clarity of what she had seen, made me realise that for Dawn, this was heaven. She had seen heaven.

Throughout this research I was often left wondering where life in all her flourishing could be found. Where was the God of abundance. The storied lives of the women spoke much about abandonment, brokenness, loss and death. I wanted to make things better, to offer healing and hope, but my resources were left wanting: "Can see so much potential in Karen's life … want to make it better for her, wave the magic wand. But there are no fairy godmothers today and even Jesus the Healer seems remote" (Research Journal, 17th September 2015).

I realise now that in my interpretation of the women's stories I had attached too much of my own script, which blurred my vision. My notion of flourishing was to blossom, to flower, and I desired this flourishing as much for myself as for the women. I wanted "the desert to sing [and] the wilderness to rejoice" (Isaiah 35:1-2 [New Revised Standard Version]). My understanding of flourishing was focused through my middle-class lens of desire and fulfilment, wellbeing and happiness. I am reminded of Clark-King's critique of Grace Jantzen: "That her theology of finitude only offers hope for those who have sufficient power in this life to see the possibility of fulfilment" (2004, p. 181). I had the resources, the education, the money, the power to 'see the possibility of fulfilment'. The women I was hearing had none of these resources, and I could only see flourishing within my own

precepts by fixing the social condition. What the women were teaching me was that flourishing "was making music in the shit and smelling the rose" (Research Journal, 21st July 2015).

Flourishing for the women was not going to be about blossoming now, in the present. For the women hope was not sustained by the possibility that one-day things would be better and life and beauty would abound. Their hope was not derived by what I understood flourishing to be in the present time. Their hope was eschatological, supported by an eternal promise, a not yet that was also very real and very near. Janet knew that her baby was with Jesus; Johanna knew that "God has a plan and a purpose"; Michelle knew her babies were a gift from God; for Irene there was always "the bright morning star"; and in the releasing of the balloons Marc "realised". There was a presence of God, but it was eschatological and was not transformational, in the sense that their earthy realities remain unchanged. "My life is shite" (Dawn).

In reflecting on how the image of flourishing could be a habitus for people living in conflict zones or with impairment, Grey writes, "where no flourishing is experienced on earth, hope in heaven is all that sustains" (2009, p. 199). Gutiérrez writes of the Christian expression of love going beyond present social injustices, seeing "the importance of gestures and ways of 'being with' that some may regard as having little political effectiveness" (1988, p. xxx). Dawn's story had really challenged my 'middle-class' notion of flourishing. What I was beginning to realise was that my 'hearing into speech' of the women was only partial as I was interpreting their 'wholeness of life' with my own weights and measures. I was presupposing my norms onto the women and their stories.

If I were to take my own lens away, what would I really be seeing and hearing?

In Dawn's story there is just enough, just enough crack of light that prevents her world slipping into the abyss: Dawn did not want to live and had sat in the same clothes for three weeks; the crack of light appears in the food parcel being delivered and the actions of the church community clearing up her house. These are the moments, the divine interruptions, the times of flourishing. These are the 'gestures' of Gutiérrez's liberative praxis (1988, p. xxx). "Hang[ing] onto our determination to keep diving back to the surface and keep living to the fullness of which we are capable … that is becoming … even flourishing …" (Grey, 2009, p. 211). It is the smallest gesture that is all that is needed to tip the balance towards hope in the face of despair; to just grasp and keep grasping, to beg even, until eventually you touch the "fringe of his cloak" and are healed (Matthew 14:36 [New Revised Standard Version]).

6.2 Fragment two: "They haven't just taken the houses down; they've torn a good community apart" (Janet)

The signs of destruction and death were all around in the community: the boarded-up homes; the fractured community; the real embodied sense of being abandoned. From urban geography we have learnt how bricks and mortar orientate our sense of self and personhood: "to be human is to be placed" (Gorringe, 2002, p. 1). The buildings carry memories and stories that shape and define our beings. The removal of 'the step' was another mark of this catastrophe of place within the community; without the step there was nowhere to meet, to interact, to be vulnerable, to be human. Not only had the physical fabric of the community been devastated, but the social assemblages (Latour, 2005) had also been fractured beyond repair. Here was desolation!

We always think we have to make good, to find some happy-ever-after story. But some situations are just awful and unjust and painful beyond the telling. What happened in Bootle and other Pathfinder Areas was wrong and

unjust. It was social cleansing of the worst kind. The words from Lamentations come to mind: “Is it nothing to you all you who pass by?” (1:12a [New Revised Standard Version]). Things were just simply allowed to happen in Bootle. The community was done for and no body raised a finger to help or object. I find that my social consciousness and Christian tradition want to try and make something good come from this. Yet, I wonder whether there is anything good that can come from any of this. How do we fix Keith as he sits in his new flat starring aimlessly out of the window? How do we hold the injustice, the fear, the anger, the lament, the broken promises and somehow begin again?

Reflecting on Grace Jantzen's work, it is this beginning again that is so important here. The desolated community spoke so much of violence and destruction as large JCB’s literally smashed up the community. In the realm of necrophilia this would be it; this would be the end, resulting only in violence and destruction and oppression. The planners did nothing to build into their programme any sense that ‘real people’ needed to live in the place, in their small tiny houses built to minimum requirements. Women’s needs were seen as “unimportant or trivial” (Greed, 2011, p. 108) leading to women’s place being designed out of city plans. It seemed that the reign of reason and logic, the ‘Rational Man’, devoid of any sense of humanness, had come into our community by the back door and had no intention of leaving until everything of value had been removed.

There was no beauty, no flourishing and no life in our community. There was plenty of evidence of violence, destruction, isolation, loneliness and death, and I did not know how to bring newness in, or where she may be found. Jantzen asks the theological and philosophical questions: “Where may we look to find the resources for redeeming the present? [and] Where are the springs of hope, that could bring newness and flourishing into a death-dealing world?” (2004, p. 3). “So back to the quarry …” (Forrester, 2005, p. 21).

Turning again to the leaven, the liberative praxis of the women, the 'text of life' held in their beings as 'living human documents', the *phronēsis*, the practical wisdom that was the reign of God: "Just being able to sit down somewhere warm with smiling faces around you and being able to talk to someone. Even if it's someone who is just lonely, and they want a gab and a cuppa tea. It does a lot …" (Janet).

Within the liberative praxis of the Bootle women this 'reign of God' was to be found in 'a cuppa tea' … 'a Battenberg Cake'. A small mundane everyday act became the seat where new beginnings were formed. The isolation and fragmentation of necrophilia gave way as human connections were made and there was the beginning of the new. It was the single grain of wheat that tipped the scales; it was the small acts of vulnerability and hospitality that tipped the scales in favour of life.

I am reminded of Lefebvre's "moment" (2014, pp. 634-652) and the singularity of God from micro-eschatology, "the sacred 'thisness' (*haecceitas*) of everyday things …" (Kearney & Kristeva, 2016, p. 95). Liberative praxis is in the present, accepting the reign of God now (Gutiérrez, 1988, p. xxx). It is there held in the 'cuppa tea' and the connections that are made at the time; the small simple act of kindness tipping the balance from necrophilia to natality, from isolation and loneliness to being held in a web of relationships.

I am minded of Clark-King's findings that Jantzen's theory of natality squeezed out the *phronēsis* of the East End women (2003, 2004). However, this research has not been about interrogating existing feminist theology but about creating a new praxis for urban church. This thesis has been about generating new women's knowledge from the white working-class women of Bootle; it is their *phronēsis* that has then become the 'first act' in defining this new feminist theological praxis for urban church. Not all of Jantzen's theology is going to hold, because this thesis has not been about Jantzen, or Gutiérrez or Slee or Graham. This thesis has been about the theology of

Dawn, June, Irene, Michelle, Karen and Debbie. It is *their* theology, *their* praxis, *their* leaven, given and shared so that the whole community may rise.

6.3 Fragment three: On the mound we planted crocus and narcissi

We can only find the leaven by "sinking [deep] roots [into the present and it is this present which] in its deepest dimensions, is pregnant with future …" (Gutiérrez, 1988, p. 12). Central within the scripted narratives of the women was a communal embodied act of reclaiming the land, situated on the field at the heart of our community. At the time of this 'act' the community was in a state of desolation, all building work had stopped and there were no future plans for it to begin again. We were in 'no man's land'.

What I have argued in this thesis is that the majority of current public urban theology fails to go beyond a purely nuanced observance of life in the urban. These theologies have done very little to provide me with any 'road metal' for my own ministerial practice. Cloak and Pears articulate a new missional praxis for urban church based on "encounter" (2016b). Their academic work resonates with my own experiences in the urban and particularly Pears' reflections on vulnerability (2013, p. 107). But their source norms are derived from observations of situational practice experience and are not generated from the actual voices and the 'living human documents' of those who are marginalised. Cloke and Pears themselves acknowledge the need for good qualitative research into the urban (2016a, p. 14). I would argue that this is a necessity, or we risk the academy speaking into and defining the praxis as opposed to letting the praxis speak for itself and define the academy. A liberative praxis does not "limp after reality" (Gutiérrez, 1988, p. 11). We need to entangle our very selves within the situational, to excavate the truths held in the urban soil (Pink, 2012, pp. 27-28). This research project extends Cloke and Pears' (2016a, 2016b) work by engendering a liberative praxis that is taken directly from hearing the Bootle women into

speech. The voices come first and then the praxis; voices that are deeply situated and entangled within the urban soil.

It was almost out of sheer desperation that I turned towards Aspinal's Field. Baker (2013) brings into the conversation of urban theology Deleuze's rhizomatic motif (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). A rhizome is a tuber, a potato growing under the ground with tendrils and nodules; it grows within the 'cracks and crevices' of urban life and is the generative place for new and emerging theologies for the urban. It was there in the physical soil of the community, in the wasteland, the dogs' toilet that we physically dug deep and placed bulbs pregnant with future and hope.

This was an embodied liberative praxis, not of egotistical theologies or philosophies of the mind, but enacted out in the physicality of our own bodies and in the physicality of the land. In our doing we were becoming the leaven. We were learning to see the land through feeling; the *le-an* of Aboriginal culture; we were tracing in our community the hidden pathways, the songlines that Sandercock (2003) had spoken of. This was a moment (Lefebvre, 2014): the chaos round about was still there; we had literally painted on the end walls of the derelict houses; we had not removed ourselves from the chaos; straightened out or tried to distract ourselves from the profundity of the everyday. Here was 'newness' entering the world; here was newness and future possibility dug into the soil of Aspinal's Field. It was a communal, a collective moment. There was laughter, conversation, eating … ordinary everyday mundane acts. These acts were the leaven. Now, here in *this* moment, *this* present time.

6.4 Fragment four: "… I took pictures of the floor and then that gorgeous beautiful cross …" (Dawn)

According to Brock it is the presence of the women who continue to "hint at the healing power of Christa …" (1998, p. 6). The women bring ointments

and cloth and anoint Christ(a)'s body. They hold 'the death space' and are the only ones who see it all and are able to witness to the full circle of life, death and resurrection. Similarly, within the community it is the women who hold the pain and the loss: Johanna's abusive marriage; Janet's drug addiction; Karen's alcohol abuse and the loss of all those close to her; and the fact also that they were poor "… never had two pennies to rub together!" (Ros). There is a need to hold this 'death space'. It is one of the three global themes from this research and needs to be attended to as we wrestle to embody a liberative praxis for the urban.

Jantzen's question returns: "How can newness enter the world?" (2004, p. 3).

The leaven was already present in the community; it was already present in the lives of the women, in acts of courage and "prophetic daring" (Slee, 2013, p. 17): "Till one day an instant happened and I just thought I could die now … so I made a sneaky phone call ..." (Johanna). It was in that instant the Johanna became a witness not just to the death but also to the rising of Christ(a). Her timeline and the timeline of the women of the Gospel crossed. It would be the women from Sefton's Women's Aid who then held space with Johanna, who would bring cloths and ointment, tissues and tears. They would form a community of love. As Jesus was enfolded in the loving care by the Gospel women (Brock, 1998, p. 97), the very indwelling of Christ(a) within Johanna's own embodied and enfleshed being was held in the loving care of the 'Gospel women' from Sefton's Women's Aid.

Dawn's praxis, her *phronēsis*, was marked by suffering but, on that day, on that moment when Dawn entered the restored St John & St James there is a meeting of the circle: "I was at home, not this home but I felt like I belonged there!" (Dawn). It was a connection of a timeline, a songline in which the past is held and remembered, literally through the old wooden floor, Dawn's embodied earthly pain being held within the 'loving community' of the church. The cross then took Dawn out of her embodied suffering, her filthy

clothes, her underwear that had not been changed for three weeks and rewove them into "festal apparel" (Zechariah 3:4 [New Revised Standard Version]). As Dawn gazed on the "gorgeous beautiful cross" her very being embodied the hope of newness and possibility. In *that* moment Dawn's life was redeemed, and there was beauty and life, and it was good.

We ask, I ask, 'How does the Messiah come?' and 'Where can I find life in all her flourishing?' There, there she is! In the leaven, in the moments, in the happenings, in the *lo cotidiano* of the ordinary and everyday experiences of the women's lives. The leaven is littered throughout the community, where the wellsprings bubble up and puncture the hard unforgiving urban soil. The physical springs in Bootle have long since been contaminated but the 'living water' can still be found in *this* happening, and *this* moment.

6.5 Fragment five: "… and that's what churches are for; for me they are sanctuary" (Ros)

Ros to me was a contradiction. Of all the women interviewed she was the one who was clear that she did not believe. "I'm not religious in any way; I have no faith in anything like that …" (Ros). Her beautiful parody of John 10:1-18 frames the section in Chapter 5 simply entitled 'the open door'. Ros talked about her door always being open and that friends would hear her voice and come in, her words were literally taken from this cannon of scripture. Yet I doubt whether Ros had ever read John 10 or saw the parody of her own words. Ros spoke to me more of Christ(a) than any of the women; she understood that a community could not be a community unless it had its church. Having denied any belief in a living God, Ros then narrated how she would sneak into the church and "light a candle and say a prayer … because it was a sanctuary" (Ros).

It is often those from outside the community who hold the revelation and the promise and the gift for the community. Most of the time we are

unaware because we do not give the 'unimportant persons' any attention or see that they may have something to contribute. It was Hagar who was an outsider, thrown out by Sarai into the wilderness, only to be found beside a well by God, who promised her a son (Genesis 16). The same is true within Bootle and what I have found throughout this research project is that it is those who are on the 'outside' of the worshipping community who hold a wisdom and *phronēsis* for us all.

The notion of church as sanctuary had passed me by. I knew that 'buildings' were significant within our community, made more evident and pronounced due to the bulldozing of so many properties. I also knew that it was important that we had a new church building restored within the community, but I saw this more in terms of a place of gathering and meeting, like the front step of the old community. However, all the narratives of the women spoke of the sacredness of the church building.

For Dawn the sacred space in the community was lost when the Old St John & St James Church was pulled down. Worshipping God in a school hall just was not church. Carol's life had been tied to St John & St James since she was a child; she spoke of her thwarted dreams, disappointments and unfulfilled ambition. As we left the old building for the final time Carol shared, "I was sad to leave the old church but I was really quite optimistic when we left that day … I thought, 'Yeah, time to move on.'" The implication was not that it was time for the church to move on but time for Carol to move on: "What's God got in store for me?" (Carol).

It was the building itself that gave an invitation, whether it was a rite of passage or just simply having an open door and being sanctuary. Clark-King (2003) finds that her research offered a contrary positionality to that of Janzen's natality (a point which has been debated in Fragment one). I wonder if the same reasoning can be applied to the notion of a church building, a very earth-bound physical fabric in which we can house God. In the physical and social landscape of Bootle there was very little that would

sing of beauty or life; the whole place embodied a "losers mentality" (Morisy, 2004, p. 82). I surmised that the reason for the church building being of such prominence within the women's narrative was because the physical presence of God in a building helped them to navigate the 'godless' reality of their present condition. They needed a physical sign that God was with them, and this sign was the literal bricks and mortar of the church. The building was a sign "that God hasn't deserted us …" (Irene).

Linked with the concept of sacred space and sanctuary was the practice of motherhood. All the women were mothers, and their children were the reason for their lives. It was the epiphany moment for Janet when she sought help for her drug addiction: "It was time for me to grow up and be a mum to me kids!" (Janet). Michelle's narrative was stilted and disjointed until she started talking about making cupcakes and gateaux for her family. Michelle's faith was meshed and woven into her role as a mother, and it was difficult to separate the two.

Giving birth and motherhood, church as sanctuary and sacred space, are distinct ways in which the women's lives embody hope. There is possibility and new birth coming into being within the women's embodied earthly reality. Through literally giving birth, the women find their place within the complex dynamic ebb and flow of urban life. The women's "belief in life after death is not a mere tranquiliser but [a] basis for action and … self-determination … It prevents grief debilitating and is a source for hope …" (Clark-King, 2003, pp. 246-247).

6.6 Fragment six: "… I could walk a mile in their shoes" (Johanna)

This research project has taught me to look first to the women, because in the women, the reign of God is to be found, present and pregnant and waiting to be discovered and brought into the world. The women gifted to us fragments, fragments of the 'host', fragments of the body, that we too may

know her risen life. This life was revealed as their lives were storied and narrated, as they gave voice to their 'tale'.

The generous warmth of transformational love in action was embodied in the women's stories. The reign of God was present, demonstrated in their own embodied lives, as their lived realities spoke to us of healing and redemption.

> I wouldn't have had the journey I'd have from losing the baby and drugs and loosing me mum and dad … I need that whole journey starting from me son till now to understand a lot … There was a man sleeping in a sleeping bag on the stairs and I just wanted to bring him home, it was horrible … I just think this world would be a better place if people take the time to understand and not prejudge. (Janet)

All the wells in Bootle have been contaminated, so there are no physical springs where the women can go to quench the Jewish man's thirst (John 4). But the women had become in their embodied selves the very spring of 'living water' evident in their empathy and generosity. The women told their tale, and it was more than a telling; it was an embodied incarnational liberative praxis in which their own lives had encountered the 'man at the well' and were in a process of becoming. As the women spoke out their story and reflected on their life experiences, the very script of their lives became places of transformation in which hope was expressed through a generosity and empathy towards others. It was in the telling of their story that this life, this leaven, was revealed, brokenness held and hope made manifest.

> I think, 'Wow! What a life I've had!' … but I also feel I've got the ability to help others … I think I could walk a mile in their shoes. (Johanna)

*

[The women themselves have become witness and testimony.] But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. (John 21:25 [New Revised Standard Version])

Chapter 7. Finale: Implications and achievements

> Just being able to sit down somewhere warm with smiling faces around you and being able to talk to someone. Even if it's someone who is lonely, and they want a gab and a cuppa tea. It does a lot. (Janet)

Jantzen's questions of "Where may we look to find the resources for redeeming the present?" and "Where are the springs of hope, that could bring newness and flourishing into a death-dealing world?" (2004, p. 3) are answered in and within the new rhizomatic knowledge that the Bootle women bring to the academy and the Church. Within a post-regeneration community I was struggling to find any meaningful theological resources that could aid me in my task as parish priest. In this thesis I have begun to develop a new feminist theological praxis for urban church. This praxis, I suggest, is more likely to lead to conditions of flourishing and life than the current arborescent paradigm of the Church of England. This new women's knowledge is defined within this thesis as a Thematic Network (TN) and has been presented in the form of stories and fragments. It is cited from within the ordinary and everyday, the *lo cotidiano* of twelve white working-class women from Bootle. It is through the use of story and the attention to the ordinary and everyday that this thesis has generated fresh theological insights and understandings; and that, I argue, can help and assist the urban church towards a more sustaining and flourishing presence.

In this concluding chapter I will address the wider implications and achievements of this research project. This is the 'so what?' question, as Stephen Pattison would say, of practical theological research (Pattison, 2007, p. 8, cited in Bennett, Graham, Pattison & Walton, 2018, p. 154). I will outline the contribution that this thesis makes to the ongoing discourses

within feminist practical theology by considering the issues of *'middle-class bias'* and the *'principles and pragmatics'* of feminist research. I will consider the contribution this thesis makes to public urban theological practice by literally digging deep into the urban soil and '*holding the death space'*. Drawing these themes together, I will conclude, it is the 'new horizon' to Grace Jantzen's theory of natality and a deeper understanding of the concept of flourishing that is this research project's most significant finding and contribution to new academic knowledge.

Within this conclusion I will also consider the wider implications of this research for Church practices and identify new possible areas for future research agendas. I will reflect on the added value to my thesis of displaying my research findings as a TN; and will validate the use of a TNA as a helpful analytical tool for narrative based urban research. I will consider Terry Veling's 'what if?' question which follows on from Pattison's 'so what?' (Bennett *et al*, 2018, pp. 154-155) and indicate the potential for the transformative understandings this thesis contains. Finally, I will conclude by reflecting on my own experience of the DProf process as transformational praxis.

7.1 Contribution to feminist practical theology

There is still a need, as this and other feminist theological qualitative research demonstrates, to continually check and critique the patriarchal assumptions that lead to the alienation and fragmentation of women's selves and lives. In presenting the findings of this research at the Faith Lives of Women and Girls Conference I was aware of the increasing body of feminist practical theological research that is now occurring in the UK (26-27 March 2019). [26] This research project makes a contribution to this

[26] The Faith Lives of Women and Girls Conference: Identities, Experiences, Practices, and Beliefs (26-27 March 2019) Queen's Foundation, Birmingham. Organised as part of the Faith Lives of Women and Girls Symposium: www.queens.ac.uk/the-faith-lives-of-women-and-girls

developing field of scholarship and practice through demonstrating the ways in which a feminist methodological approach can help generate new theological insights for the urban church. *'Principles and pragmatics'* and '*middle-class bias'* are two particular issues that have arisen from this thesis; and that contribute to the wider academic discourses and conversations within feminist practical theology.

i. Principles and pragmatics

This research project has confirmed other feminist claims that knowledge always originates in concrete social contexts, and that these contexts have tended to privilege Western cerebral constructs of knowledge, which oppress women's voices and experiences. Isasi-Díaz makes the point that in order to give birth to an authentic women-centred liberation theology it is necessary to develop new methods and theories: "Much less could we develop our theologies using the same criteria, and sources that men theologians have used" (2002, p. 5). Within this thesis I have attempted to construct a new women's theological praxis for urban church, derived from women's experience and speaking in women's own voice.

Phillips, Porter and Slee set out the broad scope of criteria that "makes for good and authentic feminist research practice" (2018, p. 6). These criteria are reflected within my own research project: an attention to "accountable and responsible knowing"; marked by "explicit reflexivity"; and a concern with "social justice" (Ibid, p. 6). The challenge for feminist researchers is how can we ensure that our chosen methods and methodological approaches facilitate and support the claim that our research is definitively feminist. This issue is explored in Para. 3.1 of my thesis and is also considered by Slee, Porter and Phillips in their newly published work, *Researching Female Faith* (2018, pp. 4-7).

In seeking to construct a women-centred research project I have had to acknowledge the occasions when the keeping of feminist principles were out-weighed by the pragmatics of the research agenda. My aim throughout this research has been to uncover the lived experience of the Bootle women. This has been facilitated by my adoption and use of semi-structured interviews as a research method (see Para. 3.3). Social scientific research methods were initially understood by feminist researchers as having an inherent gender bias, with women's experience often being written out of social scientific experiments and the "use of male only subjects in studies of human participation" (Phillips, Porter & Slee, 2018, p. 5). Within Chapter 5 of this thesis the Bootle women's own voice and experience is narrated through story: *the dinosaur lamp*; *the house that died … the open door.* All these stories have been elicited using semi-structured interviews. It is the rich theological insights, which have been generated through these stories, that confirm and validate this methodical approach for the genuine and authentic exploration of women's lives.

Based on my own research experience, I would conclude that my choice of research methodology proved valid and appropriate insofar as it facilitated good evidenced based practice. From the findings of this research, I would suggest, there is a need for feminist researchers to be pragmatic and not to totally exclude traditionally male-centred research methods in the pursuit of a purist feminist agenda. As feminist theologians and researchers we have to learn to fuse and adapt male-centred theologies and practices or, as Walton asserts, "to both accuse and affirm in a simultaneous and inclusive gesture" (2014, p. 160).

ii. Middle-class bias

My particular area of research was different to my own standpoint and worldview. I was a white educated middle-class woman who was not a mother and who was researching white working-class mothers with no

recognised educational qualifications. The danger of including white working-class voices into a middle-class academic forum is that the middle-class lens of academia redefines their voice. The question I needed to ask was, in whose interest is this research being conducted? How could I legitimately research Others without loss of agency for the women participants and without creating them into an "exotic other" (Thistlethwaite, 1994, p. 6)? The tension of researching Others remains a key ethical issue for feminist researchers (Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1996) and is explored further in Para. 3.6 of this thesis.

Throughout this thesis I was constantly challenged to remove my middle-class lens of misrepresentation. It was through developing a high degree of reflexivity and being constantly ethically aware that I was able to offset some of the power in balance between the women research participants and myself as researcher. In *Fragment one,* it was as I became reflexively aware of my own middle-class biases and assumptions, that I was able to hear with greater clarity the raw authenticity of the women's own voices and experiences. It was this removal of my middle-class lens, which then led to new theological insights and a deeper understanding of flourishing, from the perspective of the Bootle women.

It was Dawn's story that really challenged my middle-class notion of flourishing (Para. 5.1 and *Fragment one*). I realised that I was interpreting the women's 'fullness of life' by presupposing my middle-class norms and values onto the women and their stories. From my middle-class perspective, the concept of flourishing and life were limited to an understanding based on fixing the social condition and to a blossoming now in the present time. The Bootle women were teaching me that flourishing and life were as much about 'hanging on in there'. In Dawn's story there was just a crack of light, the crack of light appeared as the church took round a food hamper, this was a 'moment' of divine interruption that prevented Dawn's world from sliding into the abyss. The moment was just enough to sustain. All of the women spoke about material poverty, of 'living on the edge' and of having

"nothing" (Ros). "It's no use saying it's only ten pence if you haven't got ten pence to put in the … meter" (Irene). Flourishing, from the Bootle women's perspective, was about resilience (see Para. 5.8); an ability to 'make something out of nothing'; and hanging onto the thinnest of threads.

The women were teaching me to see and feel the land differently. I could only see fragmentation and demolition, the women spoke of community and hope and relationship. Hope was revealed in 'a cup of tea', a small act of tenderness and kindness, which shifted the balance from fragmentation and isolation to a seat of new relationships. It was the vicar who shared 'a cup of tea' with Ros' dad, bringing Ros into relationship with the church; it was through sharing 'a gab and a cuppa tea' that Janet found salvation; it was 'a cup of tea and Battenberg Cake' that created a place of encounter in June's front sitting room. The significance of this small mundane act is explored in Para. 5.6 and *Fragment two*. From within my middle-class paradigm I wanted to 'fix Keith' as he stared aimlessly out of his flat window (Para. 5.3). The women were teaching me to understand flourishing and life, not by fixing the social condition, but by simple gestures of kindness that tipped the balance in favour of life.

It is this shift in my understanding of the concept of flourishing that has had a significant impact upon my own personhood and ministerial practice. Prior to this research I understood the call of urban ministry to be one in which I viewed myself as an enabler, a resource, and a catalyst for change; I was the one who could bring about healing and life. Now my understanding of urban ministry has shifted space. It is less about how I can affect change and more about how the hope and life present in the urban scene, in the women's own *phronēsis*, can assist myself and the urban church towards healing and life.

The removal of my middle-class lens of misrepresentation has enabled a deeper and more profound understanding of flourishing, the significance of which I am still outworking on a personal and professional level. It is this

new understanding of the concept of flourishing that, I would suggest, is this research project's most significant finding and also an area of potential for further investigation and enquiry. Within this conclusion, the contribution my research has made towards a broader and deeper understanding of flourishing is further developed by considering the 'new horizon' the Bootle women offer to Grace Jantzen's theory of natality (see Para. 7.3).

This project has clearly demonstrated the benefits of good qualitative feminist practical theological research in order to attend to and validate women's own particular experience and voice. This will, I have argued, go someway to addressing the dearth of feminist research within urban theological practice, particularly that which gives explicit consideration to white working-class voices and experiences.

The TN, which defines the Bootle women's *phronēsis*, evidences the rich and deep theological insights that have been discovered through this research project (see Fig. 4.1). These findings indicate the importance of researching Others and validate the claim of this research for the intentional inclusion of marginalised voices within our research agendas. Following the liberative and feminist tradition this would seem to be an imperative otherwise we are in danger of undoing the very principles at the heart of our practice

7.2 Contribution to public urban theology

This research project makes a significant and important contribution to the academy by defining an authentic public urban theology that is rooted from and within the concrete experiences of a marginalised community and through attending to the lived experience of white working-class women. Following the work of de Certeau (1988), Isasi-Díaz (2002), Lefebvre (1991, 2014), Miller-McLemore (2014), Pink (2012, 2015), and Walton (2014, 2017) this thesis validates the *lo cotidiano* of the Bootle women as a genuine site for new theological discourses.

It is through intentionally citing my theological reflections around *'objects of the ordinary'* (Chapter 5) that I have been able to construct an authentic grassroots theology and faith born out of the ordinary and everyday. This new feminist theological praxis for urban church reveals God's salvation through the 'making and baking of cupcakes' (Para. 5.9). We learn of God's constancy and faithfulness through Ros' 'open front door' (Para. 5.10); and in Dawn's story it was through the metal mesh of the light bulb in the hospice that we glimpse heaven. The Bootle women subvert the dominant patriarchal narrative of the Church with their own wisdom and testimony cited within the ordinary and everyday. It is this organic and heuristic approach to theology that, I argue, is more likely to lead to flourishing and life within marginalised communities.

i. Rhizomatic knowledge

Within this thesis the conceptualisation of knowledge as rhizomatic and arborescent (Baker, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) has enabled the Bootle women to make their own particular contribution to rhizomatic urban theological practice. Building on the work of urban theorists (Cloke & Pears, 2016a, 2016b; McBeath, 2009; Pears, 2013; Shannahan, 2010) I suggested the need to dig deep beneath the surface of the urban scene to where rhizomatic nodules of hope could be found. This was literally and metaphorically enacted out in Aspinal's Field as we dug into the urban soil and planted crocus and narcissi. It was from within the actual physical fabric of the community, the bricks and the mortar, the dirt and the soil that the women's stories were narrated.

The Bootle women's *phronēsis* has been defined in this thesis as the Gift of Leaven. It is unique and particular to the Bootle women and has emerged rhizomatically out of the 'cracks and the crevices' of life. The leaven was present in Sandercock's (2003) 'songlines' where stories from the past were

re-enacted into future possibilities. The 'old wooden floor' connected Dawn's past history to a future hope (Para. 5.7); and in the communal act of reclaiming Aspinal's field Marjorie's dance was brought back to life by the formation of a new community through laughter and story (Para. 5.4 and *Fragment three*). The songlines were the invisible pathways that "connected all the activities which [were] distinctively human" (Sandercock, 2003, p. 228). They were present within the women's generative empathy and compassion, enabling them to see beyond their own brokenness to helping and aiding others. Johanna's desire to help others who had been affected by abuse; and Janet's empathetic understanding towards people trapped by addiction (*Fragment six*). It is this practical wisdom of the Bootle women, which, I now suggest, can help and assist the Church towards a more authentic and heuristic missional approach for urban communities.

This study has clearly evidenced a direct correlation between the physical environment and the well-being of a community. Building on the work of urban geographers (Greed, 1994; Massey, 2001, 2005; Sandercock, 2003) and as demonstrated by one of the three global themes from this study, the Bootle women's *phronēsis* was deeply placed and particular (Fig. 4.2). The women's stories were narrated through a collective memory of place: defined by street names; the 'triangle' of buildings; 'the house that died' (Para. 5.2); and the physical fabric of the urban environment. This study suggests a connection between the healing of the physical land and the recovery of embodied hope for the urban church, as is illustrated in the physical act of digging deep into Aspinal's Field and planting bulbs (see Para. 5.4 and *Fragment three*). As the Church devises new approaches for mission, from the findings of this research, it would seem an imperative that consideration is given to the urban environment within which the local church is placed. There is a practical wisdom that would suggest physically digging into the urban soil so that crocus and narcissi can be planted.

ii. Holding the death space

The 'death space' is an important attribute of the Bootle women's *phronēsis* that has wider theological implications for the academy and the Church. The women were freely able to name the terrors of life and it is the naming of the terrors that is so important to recognise; it is Ackermann's (1998) lost lament of Western Christianity. The death space within the women's own lives was mirrored by the death space within the community. Karen describing how all those close to her had died; Dawn writing a suicide note to her mum; June's tears as she voiced her fears for her son; the death of Janet's baby; the literal bulldozing of homes, schools, churches; and the fracturing of the very essence of community: "They haven't just taken the houses down; they've torn a good community apart" (Janet). The implications of the death space for Church practices and the academy is that is necessitates an attending to and a creating of spaces for the naming and holding of the pains and the terrors of life.

Rambo's (2010) work enabled me to recognise the important place of witness that the Bootle women embodied in relation to the naming of life's terrors. The Bootle women's *phronēsis* disrupts the linear reading of the Gospel narrative: that presupposition of Christian triumphalism onto all of life's traumas and the necessity to try and claim that every story has a happy-ever-after ending. In the telling of their stories the Bootle women become witnesses to the death but also to the rising of Christ(a). The linear reading of the crucifixion, the Easter Saturday and the rising of Christ(a) was subverted and disrupted by the Bootle women's own *phronēsis* into a web of interconnectivity and life. Johanna described how at the very point of annihilation in her own life, she found courage to contact Sefton's Women's Aid. It was the community of women, from Sefton's Women's Aid who then gathered with their tissues and tears, ointments and spices (*Fragment four*). Karen's life was pitted with tragedy, alcohol addiction, and a time spent in prison. There was no 'happy ending' to her story and yet, from within her

faltering speech, hope was manifested as Karen found a belief in God through the physical act of going to church (Para. 3.5 and Para 5.7). The terror of life was not written out but held within a community of compassion. From the findings of this research it is the connections between the three global themes that are significant and important. The death space is held within the global theme of hope; the physical fabric of the community, the bricks and the mortar; and also the myriad of relationships. It is this interconnectivity, which enables life and flourishing within the urban context.

The death space of the Bootle women profoundly challenges our understanding of a 'successful' church. The current church growth agenda measures success through financial viability and the establishment of new congregations. [27] These agendas are now being centrally financed through new Strategic Development Funding released by the Church Commissioners (Church of England, 2019). From the findings of this research project, in order for the local church to maintain a sustaining presence within the urban, it would seem necessary for there to be a defiant resistance to the imposition of the top down, success driven strategies that currently dominate the Church of England. The urban church should be allowed to define her own agenda and be encouraged towards practices that are earthed in the concrete reality of the urban condition. This research has suggested that this practice would more likely be marked by vulnerability and terror; the marks of the risen Christ.

This research makes a sustained and valid argument that the agenda for the Church should be about recognising and encouraging the 'reign of God' and establishing urban church communities that can authentically witness to the God of flourishing and life. As evidenced by this research, it was Ros, who had no Christian belief, who understood the profound importance that a

[27] See the following Diocesan Vision and Strategy Statements: Birmingham Diocese – *Transforming Church* (www.cofebirmingham.com); Leeds Diocese – *Loving, Living, Learning* (www.leeds.anglican.org); Sheffield Diocese – *Renewed, Released, Rejuvenated* (www.sheffield.anglican.org). Retrieved July 31, 2019.

church had for a community: "I don't think there is a community without a church" (Ros, Para. 5.6). Sanctuary and life were present within the local church community but also held within the community of women from Sefton's Women's Aid and Venus Women's Centre. From the findings of this research, a priority for the urban church should be to create opportunities and spaces for meeting and for conversation with those from outside the worshipping community; so that the hope and life already present within the urban can be revealed.

In order for the transformative potential of the Gift of Leaven to be fully realised our Church practices require a reprioritisation to 'a bias to the poor'. This requires a shift away from understanding the urban as a social condition that needs to be fixed to an understanding of the urban that has light and life to offer the whole Church. This particular approach to mission, as developed by this research project, prioritises the theological concept of 'being with' (Wells, 2005) and advocates for seeing the land through feeling, the *le-an* of Aboriginal culture where songlines can be traced and celebrated. Within the current survival trajectory of the Church of England a recommitment to 'a bias to the poor' is unlikely to gain traction; but the lessons learnt from this research nevertheless clearly suggest that unless such a reorientation takes place the presence of the local church within poor marginalised communities will be severely undermined and is unlikely to survive.

There is a clear need for the arborescent strategies of the Church of England to be grounded in evidenced based practice and qualitative research, which is not apparent in the current approach of the institution. Building on the findings of this research, it would be valuable for future research agendas to consider in greater depth the transformative potential of the ordinary and everyday as genuine places for new and imaginative theological discourses. I would also suggest further research into urban church communities to facilitate a deeper understanding of the definition of a 'successful' church from within the urban context.

7.3 A new horizon: Natality and flourishing

This thesis makes a contribution towards a broader and more liberative understanding of Jantzen's theory of natality by bringing into the academic fold the particular *phronēsis* of white working-class women. Acknowledging the previous work of Clark-King (2003, 2004) the findings from this research project also suggest that the idiom of salvation and belief in an after-life are important and necessary concepts to enable flourishing in the urban context.

Jantzen advocated for embodiment as a characteristic of natality: the focusing of attention on human flourishing in this world as opposed to preparations for "some other world" (2004, p. 37). In juxtaposition to Jantzen, a key finding from this research was the women's strength of belief in heaven; this was a significant factor that enabled the women to navigate the sheer brutality of urban life. For the Bootle women their present reality could not be redeemed, as Jantzen would suggest, but hope for the women was present in their eschatology of belief: Irene's 'bright morning star'; and Janet knowing her baby was with Jesus. It was the physical church building that provided sanctuary and a sign for the women "that God hasn't deserted us" (Irene). The women's role as mothers was also significant and important (*Fragment five*). It was literally through giving birth that the women embodied an expression of hope beyond the awfulness of their present circumstances. For Dawn, her children were the reason she continued to live; for Michelle her life had meaning through being the 'best mum she could be'; and for Janet her children were the epiphany moment when she took control back from her drug addiction. It was the women's own belief in a utopia that provided sanctuary for them and also meaning and purpose beyond their present predicament. The women held an eschatological belief in a heaven whilst their present reality remained unchanged: "My life is shite" (Dawn).

Jantzen's theory of natality reads against the separation of the body from the soul as defined through necrophilia and focuses our attention on the "flourishing of the whole person in *this* world" (emphasis in the original; 2004, p. 36). My research quest was prompted by my own desire to find fullness of life and flourishing within the fractured urban community. The deep practical wisdom of the Bootle women offered back to me hope and life as embodied in their own lives and practices. The Bootle women's concept of flourishing was markedly different from my own, which was shaped by my middle-class perceptions of well-being and happiness. I desired the present order to be redeemed, as Jantzen would suggest, for me life and flourishing were defined by being able to live well in *this* world. The Bootle women provided a 'new horizon' to Jantzen's theory of natality through their own *phronēsis* in which flourishing was defined by an eschatological belief in a better world outside of their present condition. Their *phronēsis* spoke of flourishing and life that was marked by resilience: a capacity to hold onto the thinnest of threads; sustained through moments (Lefebvre, 2014); simple gestures of kindness; and "the god of little things" (Kearney & Kristeva, 2016, p. 95). On entering the New St John and St James there was 'a moment' as Dawn gazed on "that gorgeous beautiful cross" (Dawn); and just for a moment there was life and beauty, and it was good (*Fragment four*).

My contention throughout this thesis is that the majority of our theologies and ecclesiologies have been constructed from an 'academic armchair'. Liberation and feminist theology in particular advocate for the inclusion of marginal voices. However, the findings of this research project would suggest that these theologies presuppose an inherent middle-class bias, as has been evidenced in relation to the concept of human flourishing. The implications of this would suggest the need to give careful consideration to the biases that we bring to our practices. The danger for us as researchers is that we presuppose our own values upon our research participants and try to mold them into our own likeness; as opposed to letting the voices speak and define their own practice. There is an assumption that "we are all middle-class" (Clark-King, 2004, p. 20); this is perhaps so much the norm

that as theologians and researchers we have become desensitised to our own class bias.

This new understanding of the concept of flourishing has, in part, been realised by my own awareness of my middle-class bias. This awareness has been facilitated through the development of a feminist research methodology, which has demanded a high degree of reflexivity. Throughout this research project extracts from my personal and research journal evidence the development of my reflexivity as a feminist researcher. It was only as I was able to 'hear myself into speech' (Morton, 1985) that I was able to hear with greater clarity the women's own particular voices. It is by citing myself within the research process and developing reflexivity that I have been able to address the issue of middle-class bias and so develop a methodology that could authentically validate the white working-class *phronēsis* of the Bootle women.

In parallel to developing a feminist methodology the attention to the ordinary and everyday, the *lo cotidiano*, has also been a contributing factor to the new theological insights that have been generated by this thesis. The new understanding of flourishing has literally been dug out of the urban soil and has been cited within the ordinary and the everyday: the cuppa tea; the Battenberg Cake; the neighbour coming round for a cup of sugar; the panting of the dog; the dinosaur lamp. It is through validating these ordinary objects as genuine sites for theological reflection that this thesis has been able to contribute a new understanding to the concept of flourishing. It is an ordinary and particular theology of the Bootle women. It is this organic and heuristic approach to theological practice that has enabled this research to uncover the liberative potential of the *phronēsis* of twelve white working-class women from Bootle.

7.4 A Thematic Network Analysis (TNA)

This research project makes a particular contribution to practical theological research through evidencing an approach to narrative analysis by the enhanced use of a TNA (Attride-Striling, 2001). Cloke and Pears (2016a) advocate the need for qualitative research into marginal communities in order that our Church practice may reflect more authentically the actual events and conditions of urban life. As narrative methods continue to be developed as a favoured approach for practical theological enquiry, from the findings of this research, I suggest careful consideration also needs to be given to the particular methods used for narrative data analysis.

This research project has been able to demonstrate how the use of a TNA provides a valid and organic methodological approach to studying urban communities. The displaying of my research findings as a TN adds value to the overall claim of my research and enables a 'thick description' of the social that would not ordinarily be represented by a generalised thematic analysis.
Within this study the use of a TNA has created diagrammatically a view in time of the 'hidden' *phronēsis* of the Bootle women; it is exactly like "fixing in formaldehyde" (Bennett *et al*, 2018, p. 11) their *phronēsis* and taking a cross-section of it. It is the TN which then defines and names the actual *phronēsis* of the Bootle women through the identification of the three global themes: hope; placed and particular; and the death space (see Fig. 4.1).

The TN represents in diagrammatic form something of the interconnectivity of the women's own lives and stories; their relationship to each other; and also their relationship to the divine. The women's stories were not narrated in a linear fashion but were revealed and enmeshed within a myriad of assemblages and associations that went into making the social (Latour, 2005); also linking to Miller-McLemore's "living human web" (1993). From the women's own *phronēsis* this interconnectivity was notably present

within the many interruptions of urban life. It was 'a knock on the door' that caused an interruption to my interview with Johanna; it was Carol's laughter that interrupted her sense of unfulfilled ambition; and the whole timeline of the community was interrupted when the bulldozers came (Para. 5.5 and Para. 5.7). It is the presentation of my data as a TN that is able to validate the claim of this research in providing an organic and nuanced understanding to the many complexities of associations that go into sustaining life in the urban. A simple thematic analysis of data would not have been able to authenticate this interconnectivity of life. It is the displaying of my research findings as a TN that establishes in diagrammatic form the interconnectivity of the women's lives and the nature and substance of their *phronēsis.*

The TN complements and enhances the theological reflections of Chapters 5 and 6 as it "brings to light the meaning, richness and magnitude of the subjective experience of social life" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 403). It is as the three global themes interact with these reflexive narratives that new theological insights are generated out of the particular *phronēsis* of the Bootle women. It is within these theological reflections that the transformational potential of the Gift of Leaven is activated; as is evidenced by the deep and rich theological insights generated within the stories and fragments.

From the evidence of this research project I would advocate that future research agendas consider the use of a TNA when conducting narrative based urban research. This research project has been able to validate the use of a TNA as a useful analytical tool that can assist urban research towards evidencing and authenticating the dynamic complexities of urban life.

7.5 *What if?*

At the very start of this thesis I cite Matthew's parable of the leaven (Matthew 13:33). It is a story set within the *lo cotidiano* of a woman; set amongst the pots and pans of everyday life; the ordinary and the mundane. It is the woman's hands that knead and make the bread, an ordinary everyday task with liberative potential. Within this thesis the Gift of Leaven is the active agent present within the women's own stories, which when released causes the whole batch of dough to rise.

It is the Bootle women's *phronēsis* that is now offered to the academy and the Church as a rich resource with transformational potential. This answers Terry Veling's 'what if?' question (Bennett *et al,* 2018, pp. 154-155) and requires a shift in our imagination to envision the potential for transformative understandings that this thesis contains for scholarship and ecclesial practice.

What if … the established Church realigned itself towards 'a bias to the poor' and undertook seriously to consider the findings of this and other urban research? Then our urban churches would begin to flourish, releasing wisdom and resources for the wider Church community.

What if … the voices and experiences of white working-class women were given their place within feminist theology and ecclesiology? Then our middle-class biases would be challenged and confronted and new liberative theologies and ecclesiologies could emerge.

What if … the ordinary and everyday, the *lo cotidiano* was taken seriously as a valid site for theological reflection and discourse? Then our urban church practices would be more likely to be able to represent the contexts and communities in which they were situated. This way of being would affirm the hope already present and active within the urban scene. Instead of the urban church perceiving it had nothing of value to offer current arborescent

Church practices; the urban church would begin to realise its own value and worth, offering its practical wisdom to assist the Church towards a more sustaining and liberating presence.

7.6 DProf process as transformational praxis

Following the principles of a feminist research methodology, there is an understanding that the researcher herself is also part of the research process and will be transformed by it (Slee, 2013). In this final section I will consider how my own practice has been affected and changed by this research. In my Reflection on Practice piece I considered the DProf journey as a form of quest narrative (see Appendix I: TH8004). At the end of the journey the researcher returns with the object of her quest but is also changed by it. I wonder now at what change has occurred in my own being and self as a reflexive researcher within this whole process.

> We come full circle and know the place where we are standing. Always undermining and questioning but now a necessity to hold space and stand upright in the small clearing in the forest. It has been a journey, academic and personal – a mining deep of the small fragments that they may become the starlight for my path … our path. Getting to the end was never a given *but* there will be a moment when the balance tips and I will know and be known.
>
> Now here, where so much has been written and thought … lost and won ... the making it worse … making it better. It is time to gather the fragments and trust in the offering a blessing for us all … this work needs completing so that Dawn *et al* can take their place within the faith life of the Church.
> (Research Journal, 3rd May 2019, Gladstone's Library)

I am beginning to realise a change within my positioning in relation to my own ministerial practice. I have shifted space from being very frustrated and angry at the oppressive metanarrative of the Church to a place of still being very frustrated and angry but with a much clearer understating of why that is and importantly that the fault is not my own. I realise that my passion and energies and giftedness do not align themselves with the current strategies for growth and discipleship of the Church of England. So in this respect the Church is always going to be a very frustrating and alienating space for me to embody. At the start of this process I only had a hunch that something was wrong, now I have a much clearer understanding of how the arborescent practices of the Church fail to provide a liberating resource within the urban context. The claims and evidence of this research have authenticated and validated my original suspicions and concerns; the research has in effect proved me right!

The consequences of this are that I now feel I have a responsibility; I have a voice. Before this research was completed I questioned my own voice and also the wisdom of the Bootle women. A lesson from this research has been to listen to and validate my own thinking and also the practical wisdom of the Bootle women. I know now that my own voice is authentic and valid as both witness and testimony. I now have no excuse for not challenging the injustices of current oppressive Church practices that continually marginalise and exclude women's voice; and the voice and the wisdom of the urban church.

The most challenging aspect of my research was "hear[ing] into speech" (Morton, 1985) the women's own stories. I realised that in order for me to hear their stories I also needed to hear my own story. I found that at an unconscious level I was more able to listen to the women and was subsequently a more effective researcher when I was also able to be present and authentic within my own being. A consequence is that this research has led me to consider the areas of terror within my own life experience and to begin to speak of them. As within the women's *phronēsis* it is the naming

and the speaking of the terror, the acknowledging of the death space that is so important. I know that not every story is going to have a happy-ever-after ending but I am learning to hold the space and also take courage from the women's own *phronēsis*.

At the start of this research project I questioned where life in all her fullness could be found? The question was as much for myself as it was for the women and the urban community. Through the *phronēsis* of the Bootle women I have come to a new and deeper understanding of flourishing and life. I have learnt that flourishing is as much about 'hanging on in there' and a grim determination but with a sure knowledge that the scales have already been tipped in favour of life. This is leading me along a kinder path of being able to hold my own contradictions, doubts, and uncertainties as I stumble along the pilgrim way.

7.7 And finally …

> When human beings have finished they are just beginning.
> (Sirach 18:7 [New Revised Standard Version]).

The end of my thesis is in many ways just a beginning, a staging post along the journey of practical theological research (Bennett *et al,* 2018, p. 31). It is as we move forward that the implications and findings of this research, the practical wisdom of the Bootle women can begin to outwork itself within our practices and within the lives of our faith communities. The research process does not end but begins as this thesis is concluded, it is as this praxis is performed through actions that the real liberative potential of the Gift of Leaven is realised. The Gift of Leaven: a new feminist theological praxis for urban church.

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Appendix I: Portfolio DProf stage one (supplied on CD)

1 FHREC Application for Ethical Approval

2 TH8002 Literature Review

3 TH8003 Publishable Article

4 TH8004 Reflection on Practice

5 TH8005 Research Proposal

Appendix II: Letter of approval: Ethics Committee

University of Chester
Faculty of Humanities

Dean of Humanities
Professor Robert E Warner
BA, MA, PhD, FRSA
Direct Line 01244 511980
r.warner@chester.ac.uk

Rev Claire Dawson
20 Mount Ave
Bootle
Liverpool
L20 6DT

13 June 2014

Dear Claire,

Thank you for your submission to the Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Committee, which was considered by the Committee on 11 June 2014. The Committee is conscious of the work involved in the preparation of such research proposals and is grateful for your attention to this.

The Committee decided that your proposal should be approved. You are therefore now free to pursue the project in the knowledge that it has been approved by the University. However, as a duty of care the Committee would like you to consider that as well as having a mobile phone with you when you conduct these interviews that you also inform an appropriate person of your whereabouts.

It was noted in your application that participants will be informed that even though their data is anonymised it may still be possible to trace who the participant is from other information disclosed. The Committee agreed that if an individual requires absolute anonymity then the secondary information should be disguised so that they cannot be identified.

The Committee advise that you should change the contact details regarding issues, complaints or adverse effects on your application form and participant information sheet to the Dean of Humanities:

Prof. Robert E. Warner,
Executive Dean of Humanities,
University of Chester,
Chester
CH1 4BJ
Tel. 01244 511980

Please get in touch with me if you have any queries about this letter or your next steps.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Robert E. Warner
Chair of the Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Committee

cc: Dr Wayne Morris

Appendix III: Extract of coded transcripts relating to basic themes

Irene	Janet	Carol
Personal Narrative		
Roots: 'I was born, born there in Edith Road' (1) 'It's just in you, you know' (2)	Roots: 'moved to Province Road when I was five ..37 years…' (1)	Roots: 'I was born here…me mum had come to Bootle when she was about 10ish…' (1)
Family: 'more or less relatives in every road' (1) 'I'd more or less starved if it hadn't been for me mother and father' (3)	Family: 'me mum and me sister they ended up taking the kids' (2) '…I had a good family me mum and dad me brother and sister they were brilliant ... we've always been close' (2) 'If it was me and my aunty I'd bring her to live with me or I'd move in' (8)	Sense of place and belonging: 'so I've lived all my life in Bootle' (1)
Secure/protected: 'Safe. Felt safe. Happy…didn't know any thing about the outside world…the community that we were in the Klondyke it was like an Islan…it was all a protection… everybody sought of knew one another' (1) 'growing up felt very safe and protected really cause other mothers would look out for you as well' (2)	Pregnant: 'got caught pregnant with me daughter when I was 17…had three by the time I was 24..' (1)	Loss: 'when me dad died just before me 8th birthday..' (2)
	Parenting: 'Tried to bring them up as me mum brought us up' (1)	Thwarted dreams /disappointments: 'didn't do as well as I'd hoped in me 'O' Levels…I had wanted to be a nurse for a quite a

		while that was the plan actually…I could of found another route to nursing but I suppose I never did…I just got into the secretarial thing..' (3) '…I thought oh heck it starts this week and I haven't done any thing about it… so last Thursday came and went and I did think I should have done that (reader training)' (14)
Resourceful: 'I put the little fella in the pram and marched round the Klondyke knocking on doors would you like to join me club and I'm having a baby' (3) '…they'd give you a load of sacks and a load of envelopes…You'd see us all with prams marching up to Vernon's taking them back to get this £8…but £8 was £8' (3)	Disease/Drugs: 'considering what I've put them through…me being a drug addict and heroin addict for 7 years…it was pretty hard on them' (2). 'I was 33…me mum said it was because I lost me son…may be it was curiosity' (2)	Unfulfilled ambition: ' I have always been a little bit too nervous about doing certain things…I stayed at home, I stayed at home too long…it would have been nice to go and work somewhere else…I didn't go to Uni or I did not do things like that…I Know someone who had gone abroad to work with the World Health Organization and I thought that would be good but I didn't have the bottle for it…' (3/4) '…I didn't sort of branch out….I have never lived on me own never done what

		Sarah's doing…I stayed in the same place for 14 years…so that's my working life really basically two places so I've never been very adventurous in doing different things…' (5)
Resilience: 'It was £2.50 a week mortgage…we hadn't had it long and me and me husband split up then…I've got to find the money somehow and I more or less starved' (3)	Guilt: 'But I have to live with the guilt…' (2)	Timeline: '…no Alpha was before Sarah…was it? Trying to think…oh yeas it was before then it was I was married but it was before I had Sarah' 6
Survival: 'It was a terrible struggle but I did get by…'It's no use saying it's only 10 pence if you haven't got 10 pence to put in the, which I didn't, I didn't have 10 pence to put into the meter…' (4) 'me first husband went and he left and we nearly lost the house and I had to fight tooth and nail to keep it' (6)	Tragic: 'I lost me son…' (2)	Undervaluing self/low self-esteem: 'I'd like to nominate you for Gummel and I looked at her as if she had two heads…what do they see that I don't see? …PCC where you voted and I got voted on…and I'm thinking why on earth did I get picked' (7) '…I don't know what he saw in that…I really don't get that cause I don't think that God's gifted me in that way.' (13)
Community Narrative		
Community: 'the community was still close…the neighbours buying me presents for	Place/names: Province, Grogan, Bedford	Place names- story arises out of place (school, getting married growing

me marriage' (2) "didn't want to leave the community you see I just had them strong links even when I left and got married ...just couldn't wait to come back to that close community' (2)		up etc., all linked to place…got married from Wild Place…went to school George of England in Fernhill … 'went to Roberts School… mmn that was Pennington Avenue…off Bailey Drive….lived in Wild Place till I moved to Patricia Grove…haven't moved far… (laugh)' (2) (Q: why the laugh – is her life not serious?)
Names/Landmarks: 'house in Eleanor...mum and dad still lived in Edith' (2)	Disease: 'it's a lot rougher and there is more police on the streets' (1)	Shared activity and identity: 'I liked to going to church and I liked to be with me friends' (2)
Private ownership: "Merseyside Improved Homes took over from the landlord Mr Jones...he owned all the houses and then started selling them off. Which I bought my house from him... (2)	Well being: 'streets been brilliant…look out for everyone…sit out at night and have a cuppa…or if anyone's decorating a few of us will do it…so community wise it's good' (1)	Place: 'Lancashire Tar, where Tesco's is…they shortened it to Lanstar..' (3)
Landmarks: 'Vernon's (pools) was there on the corner where they generally do the fair' (2)	Gangs: 'I try to make sure I'm in before 10 at night…I'm a bit nervous' (1) 'youngest son was in with one gang, got in a lot of trouble…as each gang comes long seems to get worse…' (1)	Loss of memory/place: 'all the houses…all around where I used to live they were all pulled down' (5) '…if you are looking at your history and you are looking back then things that were part of your life are sort of gone…like school and church

Church/Faith Narrative		
Acceptance: 'once you stop fighting and you accept peace comes. Once I stopped fighting' (8)	Rites of passage: 'he was still born that's how I came to church…the kids…kept asking me to go to church but I wouldn't, I was heavily pregnant and I said I'd wait till we've had the baby…obviously the baby died and Mike done the funeral and it just went from there'..(3) 'when we lost me mum and me dad once the funeral was over…they are safe…they are with Jesus and nothing is going to happen to them.' (4)	Rites of passage: 'she married me dad at St John & St James…was christened at St John & St James '(1)… Q: where did you get married: 'Guess ? St John & St James' (2)
Holy Presence: 'I look out of my window In Eleanor and there's always…a star there and I'd always thought of that passage in the bible and it says I am the Bright Morning Star and I'd look at that and I'd go I know Lord, you're not leaving me, I know.' (8)	Salvation: 'It (church) was urm life saver really..' (3)…because if I hadn't believed that urm Todd was with Jesus I think I'd have lost it' (4) 'church saved me life' (4)	Continuity/tradition: 'we didn't go to church every week but me mum um…was associated with the church…but the vicar used to come round with the magazine…Rev Sharman…and we used to go some Sunday's' (2)
Trust: 'I 've got to trust you…and it was when I stop the fight that peace came and I just know everything was in God's hands, everything was for a purpose' (9)	Relationship: 'That's where I met the majority of people and I'm still in touch with now…been away with them…use to go down to the beach.. (3)	Place & identity: 'BUT through all this I still used to go to St John & St James …high days and holidays' (2) '…even though I used to go to Springwell for things and earlier to Christ church. If someone was to say what's you church I would have said St John & St James' (2)
Incarnational: 'no coincidence that the	Mutuality: 'we could just talk about anything…debts…	Promise: '…the Gideons came in

church had come down at the same time' (9)	days out…marriage…we'd all sit and listen and we'd talk about it…' (3)	with their little bible…in it it says about promising to read your bible and I made that promise…' (3)
'It was as if God was saying I'm losing mine as well…He was sort of part of it…he had understanding (9)	Restoration: 'You'd come away feeling good and you'd make friends that you never think you would make…'(3)	Hope: 'it was sad to leave the old church but I was really quite optimistic when we left that day… I thought yeah, time to move on' (5)
Risk: 'When you bought St Stephen's and you said we'd be short of £50 000'	Welcome: 'most people did make me feel welcome' (4)	Belonging: 'this isn't church… it's like a hall…well I didn't think that was church but I have completely changed my idea about that because church is where ever you are…'(6)